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Representing Migrants

Critical Curation in the Danish Welfare State

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0.0 Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into how curators navigate the changing politics of the Danish art scene to represent migrants in contemporary art exhibitions. As its point of departure, this research looks at the contested relationship between Denmark's dominant narratives of cultural homogeneity and welfare state egalitarianism, and the implications of these for an ever-growing presence of racialized non-Western migrants. From this point, it examines how critical curatorial practices are used to mediate cultural representations of this racially othered group in a context of colonial amnesia and growing political conservatism toward immigration from non-Western countries. Drawing on theories of social structures and their transformation, representation, and race by Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau & Steven Rendall, Stuart Hall, and Ann Laura Stoler respectively, the thesis conceptualizes curators as political actors in a socially constructed cultural field. In this field, relatively weaker curators interact with other actors, institutions, and structures—each guided by their individual backgrounds and institutional legacies—in their attempts to represent the empirical categories of “migrants” and “race” whose interpreted meanings inform societal understandings of these represented subjects.

Employing a narrative and situational analysis, the research traces the shifting politics of the Danish art scene and curator practices over the course of three cultural movements in recent Danish cultural history: the postwar institutionalization of the Danish art scene by the welfare state, the rise of Danish Cultural Radicalism at the turn of the century, and the reconstitution of the welfare state inscribed political order from 2022 to the present. Through examination of these extended-cases, the thesis reveals how independent curators—despite their weaker positions—strategically navigate a politics of representation constituted by shifting state political and financial regulation, increasingly powerful private foundations and their logics, and dominant ideological constraints to challenge accepted understandings of Danishness and racial belonging. Relying on their social networks, growing importance and influence in the art scene, and critical contemporary approaches that use multiple mediums like events to get their message across despite regulation, curators are able to achieve their desired project outcomes. Yet, these efforts often reproduce contradictions: while aiming to subvert hegemonic migrant stereotypes, curators' projects sometimes reinforce them when informed and shaped by the same welfare state egalitarianism that masks the structural exclusion of racially othered non-Western migrants.

The findings highlight the curator's dual role as both mediator and political actor within a highly institutionalized cultural field, illustrating how art exhibitions can both contest and reproduce the racialized boundaries of Danish national identity. Ultimately, the thesis contributes to broader debates on cultural representation, the negotiation of racial diversity in contemporary Denmark, and the important role of the critical theoretically informed independent curator in societal knowledge construction by way of art and its exhibition.

Keywords: Migrant, race, representation, independent curator, critical curation, Danish art scene, welfare state.

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1.0 Introduction

The Danish welfare state today is associated with principles of egalitarianism and equality simultaneously as it is, some scholars argue, intricately tied to a dominant narrative of cultural homogeneity despite existing racial diversity (Olwig & Paerregaard, 2011; Andreassen, 2013; Bailey-Morley & Kumar, 2022). In her work ‘Danishness, Nordic Amnesia, and Immigrant Museums’, Lia Paula Rodrigues (2011) investigates how a ‘politics of remembrance’ structures the way other cultures are classified, categorized, and represented on the Danish Immigration Museum’s website. She argues a generalized amnesia regarding Denmark’s colonial past has severed it from the colonial structures that operate in the country today to ‘other’ and exclude racial minority groups, mentioning terms like “new-racism emerged rhetorically...as if racism...did not exist for a moment, and returns...from an unknown past” (p. 31). Furthermore, Rodrigues (2011) claims the term ‘immigrant’ in Denmark today “only refers to immigrant and descendants of non-western origin,” making “the racial other—in this case the ‘ethnic’ migrant” (Rodrigues, 2011, p. 31-32). Based on these competing narratives, the concept of race as it relates to a Danish national identity is a highly contested issue. Such contestations are where my inquiry takes point of departure.

Visiting the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in March of 2024, I viewed the exhibition of Dominican American artist Firelei Báez whose contemporary style of art looks at “how inherited stories shape and maintain culture and identity...[challenging] powerful concepts like truth and history” (Louisiana, 2024). In the center of this exhibition was a map of Greenland portrayed as if submerged under a glistening blue wave acknowledging Denmark’s “unknown past” as a colonial power (Rodrigues, 2011). I questioned if contemporary art’s critical lens had been used to acknowledge the link Rodrigues (2011) hints at between Denmark’s imperial past and the racialized treatment of non-Western migrants in the country today. In an interview with ‘The Art Angle’, art critic and author Hal Foster describes a time when critical theoretically inscribed art was operationalized for social and political resistance to rising political conservatism of the 1980s, in which Western world leaders blamed “militant students, Black activists, and strident feminists” for societal issues (Davis, 2023; Foster, 2023). Foster (2023) explains the need to explicate these abstract artistic forms of resistance prompted the specialized curator to emerge as

a mediator of the societal implications underlying artistic meanings to audiences. Today, curators are considered crucial actors in the art world, not only mediating between stakeholders but mediating the art itself, in which position they exercise power over audiences' derived understanding (Acord, 2010; Greenberg et al., 1996). While rising conservatism in Denmark as it relates to immigration from non-Western countries is signaled by the anti-immigrant sentiments echoing from Danish political discourse and policies, this thesis aims to deepen understanding of the way Denmark as a society negotiates the ever-growing presence of the racially othered through cultural representation of racialized migrants (Sandberg, 2025). As crucial actors for art mediation and meaning making, I look to curators to understand how migrant representations and the presence of those they depict in the Danish welfare state are created, regulated, and contested through cultural practices. My research question is thus:

- ❖ *How do curators navigate the changing politics of the Danish art scene to represent migrants in contemporary art exhibitions?*

1.0.1 Contested Concepts

As curators in this paper attempt to introduce and stabilize the concept of 'race', the role this term plays in this paper is as an empirical category by which its meaning and use in this thesis mirrors the way in which curators employ it in their narratives and exhibitions. Stuart Hall (1997) and Ann Laura Stoler (2016), whose work I draw on in the theoretical framework, argue concepts like 'race' acquire meaning in discourse. While Hall (2020) posits one's moldable cultural identity shapes the way one understands and relates 'race', Stoler (2016) focuses on its political function, positing it has accumulated an entire lexicon from the discourses that attempt to define it, each "producing new racial truths as they requisition and reassemble old ones" (Stoler, 2016, p. 250). She argues a "fundamental historical feature" of 'race' is its "tactical qualities" that enable it to "move easily between different political projects...for new and revised political agendas" (Stoler, 2016, p. 252).

I similarly approach the concept 'migrant', as it is used here to describe the subjects curators attempt to represent in their exhibitions. My abstractions from curator narratives guide its attached meaning to reflect what Rodrigues (2011) argues: migrants and their descendants from

non-Western countries. Hall states his “own sense of identity,...has always depended on the fact of being a migrant, on the difference from the rest of you...the colonized subject is always ‘somewhere else’: doubly marginalized, displaced” (Alexander, 2009, p. 463). I interpret curators to believe the migrants they attempt to represent share in Hall’s experience. As these scholars argue, however, concepts change through new discourses (Hall, 2020; Stoler, 2016). This is the case in Denmark as the term ‘immigrant’ was not limited to the racial ‘other’ prior to the 1990s, as will be seen in the analysis.

1.1 Thesis Narrative

The first chapter continues with a conceptualization of the curator and the theoretical framework, followed by the methodology. In order to answer the research question, the analysis is structured into three chapters divided between three cultural movements, each specific to a unique context in recent Danish cultural history. While the first analysis chapter sets up the postwar politics of the Danish art scene inscribed by the welfare state in the 1950s and 60s, the second (2002 to 2020) and third (2022 to April 2025) are accessed through curator narratives embedded in these politics and navigating their shift. As positioned perspectives, a situational analysis is used to contextualize curator narratives and their described navigation of art scene politics to attempt to represent migrants in contemporary art exhibitions. More broadly, the latter two movements offer privileged lenses into understanding how Danish society navigates the ever-growing presence of the racially othered. As members of the Danish majority, curator narratives and their contradictions enlighten us to the internal dissonance such social transformations elicit among Denmark’s dominant group, for curators when their own critical curations contest accepted Danish self-understandings.

1.2 Curator Conceptualization and Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical and conceptual lenses used to analyze my data As it relates to the research aims. I begin by conceptualizing the curator (Rubantseva & Hoffman, 2020). Through this actor’s narrative, I access understanding the broader art scene, conceptualized as Bourdieu’s (1993) ‘cultural field’ made up of actors and institutions he refers to as ‘habitus’, whose relative power or ‘capital’ benefits their ability to bend political dynamics to their will (Bourdieu, 1986; Schirone, 2023). As Bourdieu’s (1975) framework arguably lends toward field

stability, I look to De Certeau & Rendall (1984) to discuss field transformation as these authors argue power dynamics are vulnerable to individual actor ‘strategies’ or ‘tactics’ to manipulate them (Schirone, 2023). To understand how curators attempt to represent migrants, I look to Hall (2020) who argues that represented subjects are constructed as objects of knowledge through discourse, further describing representation creates subject-positions when the representer determines how the represented is understood by the viewer; when representing difference, this relationship is inscribed by a certain politics of representation (Hall, 2020; 1997). As it relates to the topic at hand, Danish, audience understanding of non-Western migrants based on the way curators present them in their contemporary art exhibitions, in which case curators have power over perceptions of migrants and audience knowledge of migrants. Stoler’s (2016) concept ‘colonial aphasia’ is used to identify and understand how the acts of obstruction of a country’s imperial history make identifying contemporary colonialism in the form of racial discrimination, exclusion, or silences a difficult task for Danish curators. Further, her concept ‘spliced self’ is used to understand curator tensions these actors are caught in when attempting to represent differences as members of the racial majority in Denmark.

This framework addresses to the overall thesis narrative as the politics of the Danish art scene have been historically structured by welfare state institutions which, through acts of obstruction, both create and reinforce dominant notions of a homogenous Danish national identity and obstruct the ways in which migrants are excluded from it with egalitarian-informed cultural policies. The work of independent curators is thus tactically navigating these politics to critically engage institutions they simultaneously rely on in their exhibitions. Meanwhile, as members of the dominant societal group, curators also navigate their internal tension between their cultural identity and critical curator identity.

1.2.1 Conceptualizing Curators

While having chosen, organized, and mediated art exhibitions to the public for centuries, it was not until the late 1960s that curators became increasingly authorial relative to artists and cultural institutions (Rubantseva & Hoffman, 2020; Wolfe, 2021). As the “true brokers of the art world” and those argued as its “most important actors in the 21st century,” curators not only mediate “between institutional bureaucracy, market forces, artistic representation, and public taste,” but

mediate the meanings behind exhibitions, what Greenberg et al. (1996) describe as “the epitome of recent intellectual and cultural manifestations” (p. 2; Millard, 2001, p. 118; Acord, 2010, p. 447). Their tasks today are to select and acquire artworks, plan and design exhibitions, preserve and conserve displayed art, facilitate educational and public engagement opportunities, conduct research, stay informed on theoretical and curatorial trends, and navigate the art market (Parrot, 2024).

Rubantseva & Huffman (2020) distinguish between institutional and independent curators. The former are guided by institutional norms to “display artworks in a linear fashion within an overall historical perspective” as a means to foster institutional archival continuity (Acord, 2010, p. 448; Alexander 1996; DiMaggio 1991; Zolberg 1981). Rubantseva & Huffman (2020) argue, structured by norms and values, institutional curators are more limited in their creative freedom despite increased job and financial security relative to their independent counterparts. Independent curators, these authors posit, are able to more fully exercise “independent artistic expression,” in turn incentivising art “museums..., galleries, exhibition spaces, festivals and biennials” to seek them out “for their wide personal networks, effective social abilities, expertise on a particular subject, and powerful vision” (Acord, 2010, p. 448-49; Rubantseva & Hoffman, 2020, p. 171-78). International biennials like *documenta* are where curators take art discourses to new heights, trialing exhibition conceptualizations which later emerge in local art scenes (documenta, 2025). These actors rely on tacit curator knowledge of cultural “conventions, internalized dialogues, and artistic codes” to effectively navigate both international and local spheres and their structures to sustain their independent profession (Acord, 2010, p. 448; Moulin and Quemin 1993). For this reason, I argue curators can offer expansive insights into the dynamics of the Danish art scene, in Bourdieu’s (1993) understanding, the Danish cultural field.

1.2.2 Bourdieu’s Field, Habitus, & Capital

Bourdieu’s ‘field’ is characterized as a...

‘social space’ inhabited by...social agents (individuals and groups), their positions, relations, and conflicts; the institutions that grant access to the field and legitimize the exercise of power; and the assets available to the agents (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Schirone, 2023, p. 188).

Adapted to the art scene, Bourdieu's 'cultural field' (1993) is made up of interacting social agents and institutions called 'habitus' defined as the "conscious and unconscious dispositions that drive an agent's behavior," shaped by one's past experiences and internalized "dominant values" (Schirone, 2023, p. 188-201). As the field analyzed has both human and institutional habitus, the latter is understood as institutional norms, values, and practices (Schirone, 2023). While Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) argue habitus is relatively stable, as per my research question to explore its changes, I opt for Hall's (2020) constructivist approach positing different cultural experiences shape habitus-informed dispositions and actions of social agents. Bourdieu's concept of 'capital' describes assets available to each habitus, identifying three types: "economic capital, or the assets that can be readily marketed and monetized; social capital, or the intangible assets constituted by relations and networks; and cultural capital, or an agent's knowledge assets" (Bourdieu, 1986; Schirone, 2023, p. 188). I include "symbolic capital" or "prestige, authority, and status" since central cultural institutions, private foundations, and state agencies benefit from this asset (Schirone, 2023, p. 188). Through Bourdieu's conceptual lenses, I look at the data to understand how the habitus of institutions and actors inform their practices and how their relative capital benefits their ability to influence art scene politics. As mentioned, Bourdieu's arguably deterministic conceptualization of habitus and the field as respectively rigid and durable, (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), I look to De Certeau & Rendall's (1984) 'tactics' and 'strategies' used by social agents to bring about field transformation.

1.2.3 De Certeau & Rendall's Tactic and Strategy

De Certeau & Rendall (1984) define 'strategy' as the "calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships," applied when a subject has the will and isolated power over a 'proper locus' to change political dynamics (p. xix). Whereas 'tactics' are the "calculated actions,...clever tricks,...[or ways of] knowing how to get away with things" used by weaker social agents to not only navigate politics influenced by more powerful agents, but also to bring about shifts themselves (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984, p. xix). This "art of the weak" permits agents without a locus to occupy and insinuate into dominant institutions simultaneously as they work against them (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984, p. 36). De Certeau & Rendall explain "power is bound by its very visibility," giving those less visible the ability to disrupt a status quo more powerful actors have established and aim to maintain (p. 37). Through Bourdieu's lens, weaker independent

curators may use their social and cultural capital to navigate and influence existing politics to gain “victories of the ‘weak’” over the “strong” (Bourdieu 1986, De Certeau & Rendall, 1984, p. 37). From this perspective, I ask what types of tactics and strategies do independent curators use to navigate their interactions with more powerful actors and institutions? What is the relation between curator (in)visibility and ability to achieve their aims? To make sense of how and why curators represent migrants, I look to the work of Hall (2020; 1997). I look to Mouffe (2014), Karpantschhof & Mikkelsen (2017), and Vigh (2008) to understand curator representational motivations and approach to framing their narratives.

1.2.4 Hall’s Constructed Representations

Stuart Hall (2020) explains, “Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other[s].” (p. 1). Inspired by Foucault, Hall explains represented subjects “take on meaning and become objects of knowledge within discourse” (Hall, 2020, p. 30). In the case of exhibitions, what Hall refers to as ‘signs’—words, sounds, images, and objects—are combined to create the discourse of the exhibition, through which represented subjects become objects of knowledge (Petersen, 2021). The way subjects are made to signify in exhibitions informs viewer understanding of and relation to represented subjects, subjecting both viewer and those viewed to what Hall calls subject-positions (2020; Petersen, 2021). When a member of the dominant cultural group represents ‘difference’, the representer has power to influence how the represented subject is understood by society as a member of the dominant group (Hall, 1997). Hall (2020) posits cultures have dominant *codes* for understanding that often “fix the relationship between” subjects and accepted representations, thus fixing how subjects are known, understood, and interacted with in a specific culture (p. 7). He explains while codes are helpful heuristics for representation interpretation, they can reinforce negative perceptions or stereotypes (Hall, 1997).

In line with his claim that differentiating is “both necessary and dangerous,” Hall describes in the British context the ‘spectacle of otherness’ serves to establish and reinforce a British national identity through an identification of what it is not, often through binary categorization labeling things as good/bad or normal/abnormal to stabilize cultural norms (Hall, 1997, p. 234; Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Said, 1978). Gramsci calls the ability to create and reinforce these norms

‘hegemony’ by which an entire society may be fashioned “according to [one’s] own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology” when they have the power to control discursive representations (Dyer, 1977; Hall, 1997, p. 259). Representing the ‘other’ is dangerous when it informs negative stereotypes that “reduce, essentialize, naturalize and fix ‘difference’” (Hall, 1997, p. 258; Brown, 1965). As Denmark grows increasingly diverse, Mouffe (2014) proposes ways in which negative perceptions of ‘the other’ can be challenged beginning with a transition from a struggle between enemies (antagonism) to one between adversaries (agonism). From this point, contentious interactions between adversaries enable recognition of the legitimacy of the other’s existence and shared human experience of a “struggle for resources, rights, and ideals” despite distinct “complex social and organizational base[s],...attitudes and strategies, and...allies and opponents” (Karpantschhof & Mikkelsen, 2017, p. 727). Karpantschhof & Mikkelsen (2017) argue contentious encounters are the common denominator of “opportunity, interaction, and transnationalism” by which social movements may make way for acceptance of a country’s new reality as a diverse cultural landscape (p. 727)

Conversely, Vigh (2008) explains how negative stereotypes become hegemonic codes in what he calls a ‘context of crisis’. He proposes to conceptualize crisis as a context since the reality is often not a temporary rupture in the status quo depriving one of their “normal sovereignty” but a pervasive context where “trauma is plural and the suffering arising from crisis the norm” (Vigh, 2008, p. 8). Instability becomes “a fact of social life and a point of departure for the production of social rules, norms and meaning” (Vigh, 2008, p. 12). As it relates to the research questions, curators narrate their projects in a context of crisis in which the disruption of the status quo resulting from increasing migration became an opportunity for powerful agents to create oppressive or discriminatory migrant stereotypes; as the crisis becomes context, such stereotypes become hegemonic codes when internalized, routinized, and adapted to, not only by dominant groups but also those subjected by them (Vigh, 2008). For this reason, I use ‘navigation’ to describe curator action or “motion within motion” of a shifting political terrain as different agents vvy for influence (Vigh, 2008, p. 18). Vigh (2008) argues disruption caused by crisis “does not reduce our obligation to work against oppression, suffering and hardship” that result from it, stating the ability to work against these outcomes is “a question of not capacity but possibility” (p. 11-12). From these perspectives I ask: What are the codes for understanding migrants in

Denmark? How do curator migrant representations challenge or reinforce these codes? What are the outcomes of subject-positions created by curators for migrant understanding by audiences? How do curators bring about contentious interactions? How and why do curators narrate their work in a ‘context of crisis’? To make sense of the contextualized crisis within which curators embed their exhibitions and how this ‘crisis’ of increased immigration from non-western gives rise to curator internal conflicts, I look to Stoler (2016).

1.2.5 Stoler’s Colonial Aphasia

As discussed, Rodrigues (2011) argues the connection between contemporary racial discrimination and the country’s colonial history is severed (Rodrigues, 2011). Stoler’s (2016) theoretical lens is used to analyze a similar case in France when she explains that while “colonial configurations are different, as are the actors,...the tactics of instantiating difference and forging an ‘internal enemy’...are colonial reverberations...with more than a distant semblance to earlier racial logics, engendered fears, and counterinsurgent tactics from which they gained their support” (p. 28). To understand the impact of the dominant narrative of Denmark as *culturally* homogenous, Stoler (2016) states,

Replacing a concept not only displaces another. It breaks up contiguities and can render invisible the mutual dependencies [of concepts used to differentiate]...[posing] methodological challenges...because concepts and the processes of occlusion they afford and the misrecognitions to which they give rise, are not external to the durabilities of imperial formations. Nor [are] what endures...distorted, partial, or derisive form[s]...of dismantled colonial systems, shorn of their potency and commanding force (p. 19-20).

Despite race’s operation through other categories of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘culture’ in Denmark, Stoler’s (2016) concept ‘colonial aphasia’ helps me to make sense of the absence of ‘race’ to describe difference in this country; she posits these acts of obstruction—“categories, concepts, and ways of knowing—...disable linkages [between] imperial practices” and modern contemporary colonial configurations (Stoler, 2016 p. 10).

As it relates to the thesis narrative, through Bourdieu (1977) and Hall’s (2020) lenses, curator habitus though shaped by cross-cultural experiences can never completely rid itself of dominant cultural perceptions, those that function to occlude curator awareness of the ways in which their implicit understandings and actions contradict their narrated critical aims the reckon with

colonial structures that oppress racialized migrants. Stoler (2016) describes one's 'spliced self' as their "capacity to know and not know simultaneously[,] ...render[ing] the space between ignorance and ignoring...a concerted political and personal [exercise], in which 'self- deception' does not do justice to the ways we each find to turn away" from our complicity or reinforcement of oppression or marginalization of the 'other' (p. 12-13; Alexander, 2009). Stoler (2016) suggests examining tensions deriving from one's spliced self to identify and understand the structures that give rise to them. Through this lens I ask: What are processes of colonial aphasia in Denmark? How do curators' spliced selves influence how they portray migrants?

1.3 Methodological Approach

In the previous section, the theoretical and conceptual lenses used to make sense of the data are discussed. As it relates to the research aims to provide understanding of the ongoing transformation of the Danish art scene to understand more broadly how race and national identity are ever-contested issues, this section discusses my research process. I employ a situational analysis to understand the shifting political situation unfolding in the Danish art scene across three cultural movements and a narrative analysis to analyze how curators understand their navigation of these politics in attempts to represent migrants in their exhibitions. This analysis employs secondary data of online resources, exhibition material, and researcher observation of exhibition events to contextualize and triangulate curator narratives as a means to provide a comprehensive undertaking of the observed situation.

1.3.1 Situational Analysis

Van Velson's (2017) 'situational analysis' uses the 'event' as a lens through which one accesses understanding of broader structural phenomena. As opposed to events, I analyze three consecutive extended-cases or cultural movements in recent Danish history to understand how the political structures of the Danish art scene have in recent history responded to the growing presence of distinct cultures and their potentially conflicting norms. Through Bourdieu's (1993; 1986) lens, these political dynamics are established and influenced by individual actors and institutions who, guided by the norms of their habitus and benefitted by their relative capital, manipulate "particular situations...to serve particular ends" related to how culturally distinct members of Danish society are represented as othered or included in the Danish population (Van

Velsen, 1978, p. 147). Guided by Van Velsen's (2017) suggestion to not rely on the 'right interpretation' to understand a situation, I consider "different accounts and interpretations" by a "range of individual manifestations" to analyze and understand investigated political processes (ibid., p. 136). My abstractions are thus based on "a number of [agents with] widely different personalities influencing or reacting to" growing racial diversity in Denmark, either to reinforce exclusion of the racially distinct or contest dominant perceptions of Danish homogeneity (p. 134).

As mentioned, the analysis is divided into three chapters to describe three chronologically occurring Danish cultural movements embedded in their own temporal, spatial, social and political contexts. Through Bourdieu's (1977; 1986; 1993) lens, the first outlines the established symbolic political order of the Danish cultural field, identifying its relevant social agents for the purposes of this study, their individual habitus, and capital—those with whom curators emerging in the second and third movements navigate interactions. Van Velsen's situational analysis is appropriate for the research aims as it accounts for relevant structures, social agents, and their actions that give rise to the analyzed situation, "not [as an] isolated instance illustrating particular generalizations," but as individual case variations from each period that offers understanding of shifting political structural phenomena of the Danish art scene over time and how it contributes to shape the navigational practices of curators in their attempt to create new migrant perceptions in Denmark (Van Velsen, 2017, p. 147).

1.3.2 Narrative Analysis

Through Hall's (2015) understanding, I treat curator narratives as embedded in "a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific"; he elaborates, "What we say is always 'in context', positioned" (p. 391-403). A narrative analysis is used as curators use an "authorial voice" as a "rhetorical device" to frame themselves and their actions in a specific way to garner desired reactions by listeners (Franzoni, 1998, p. 541). In this sense, curators create subject-positions between them, myself, and the migrants they aim to represent (Petersen, 2021). For this reason, the difference between Tone's descriptions of past projects is treated differently than Tina and Kent's descriptions of their ongoing exhibition, as they are perhaps less self critical or reflective of their ongoing work. This analytical tool enables me to determine beliefs

based on curator statements of “what they believe they do, ought to do, or would like to do,” and their biases are visible through their expressions of moral outrage, use positive or negative connotations, and the contradictions arising as a result of their conflicting norms, “those particularly apparent in societies that are experiencing the pervasive influence of other cultures” (Van Velsen, 1978, p. 134-36; Franzosi, 1998). I treat these tensions as points of inquiry to identify the ways curators “reconcile or utilize the conflicting demands” of themselves and others and the possible reasoning as to why these tensions come about (Stoler, 2016; Gluckman, 1955). This approach is also useful to discern curator perceptions of and relationship with other actors and institutions in the cultural field (Bourdieu, 1993).

Coding and analysis of curator “norms which govern or are said to govern behavior” is inspired by the theoretical framework (Van Velsen, 1978, p. 145), and thus includes ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977) of both curators and other field social agents; their ‘capital’ (economic, symbolic, social, and cultural) (Bourdieu, 1986); ‘cultural field interactions’ (Bourdieu, 1993); tactics and strategies (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984); representation: motivation, curatorial framing, approach, methods, and outcomes for migrant understanding by audiences (Hall, 2020; 1997; Stoler, 2016; Vigh, 2008; Mouffe, 2014; Karpantschhof & Mikkelsen, 2017); and tensions: between field social agents, among curators, migrants they aim to represent, and audience members, and those deriving from curator spliced selves (Hall, 2020; Stoler, 2016).

1.3.3 Data Identification and Collection

Curator narratives are collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews structured by around 20 predetermined, open-ended questions relating to themes of curator background, project motivation, curatorial approach, audience, exhibition space, and outcomes. This approach gives the interviewer the freedom to deviate from the guide to explore interviewee responses further as well as enables the interviewee to control the conversation direction (Adams, 2015; Galletta and Cross, 2013). The flexibility of this method aligns with an abductive approach used so that I may go back and forth between data, theory, and method to answer the research question and provide understanding as it relates to the thesis narrative (Tavory & Timmermans, 2022).

1.3.3.1 The Interviews

My first interview with Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich was held in-person in their Copenhagen apartment on March 10th, 2025. Consent to record was obtained and research objectives as of that moment were communicated. Over the course of an hour and half, curators spoke in tandem, adding detail to the other's response, guiding my consideration of it as a group interview and to treat their interactions as empirical objects (Morgan, 1996). This interview type influences individual narratives if interviewees feel empowered to express controversial opinions when shared with others; conversely, one may withhold if they anticipate being overruled or corrected (Kitzinger, 1995). The effect being the former in the case with Tina and Kent functioned to increase their comfortability in sharing. Data from this and my brief second interview with these curators, discussed below, is cited in the analysis as '(Interview Tina)' for Tina's responses, '(Interview Kent)' for Kent's responses, and '(Interview Tina & Kent)' for collaborative responses.

My in-person interview with curator Tone Olaf Nielsen occurred later on March 10th, 2025 at her workplace of Læger uden Græser in Copenhagen and lasted one hour. Consent to record was obtained and project objectives at the time of the interview were communicated. In the analysis, data from this interview is cited using '(Interview Tone)'. Tone's elaborations of foundations in the field informed my decision to conduct a second interview with Tina and Kent to explore this emergent theme, as per the abductive approach (Tavory & Timmermans, 2022).

The second interview with Tina and Kent was conducted telephonically for convenience while they were traveling on March 20th, 2025 and lasted 30 minutes (Farooq & Villiers, 2017). Having "built rapport" in our first interview, curators were comfortable and open with responses (Farooq & Villiers, 2017) and networked my last interview with their primary collaborator on their current project Anastasija (Nastija) Kayak.

For accessibility and convenience, my hour-long interview with Nastja, based in the Netherlands, was held on Zoom on April 7th, 2025 (De Villiers et al., 2022). Guided by 11 open-ended questions on similar themes to curator interviews, my interview gave Nastja space to share their perspective of the exhibition, emphasizing what they deem important (Adams, 2015). Per their

request, the interview was not recorded, so data deriving from this interview was collected through in-depth notes and is cited in the analysis as '(Interview Nastja)'. My abstractions from this interview are triangulated by Tina and Kent's narratives, online descriptions of Nastja's work and background, and my observations of Nastja's presentation at an exhibition event.

Van Velsen (1978) suggests to the extent possible that "the total context of the cases" is "recorded, presented situationally, and actors are specified" (Van Velsen, 1978, p. 147).

Secondary data enables me to both triangulate curator narratives and contextualize curator narrated actions based on external data on the institutions with whom curators interact to create their exhibitions. This data consists of existing literature, online resources of individual curator webpages, past interviews, exhibition descriptions on institutional websites, exhibition pamphlets and posters—cited in the analysis as '(Poster)', and my observations and interpretations of exhibition material and events. This data was recorded through in-depth notetaking. I attended a presentation and panel discussion connected to the ongoing exhibition on February 27th, 2025, described in the analysis and cited as '(Event 2)'. I also attended the closing event on April, 24th, 2025 where a new installation was unveiled and curators discussed their curation process and motivation, cited in the analysis as '(Finissage)'.

1.3.4 Limitations and Positionality

The analysis should be read with certain limitations in mind. As it contributes to the overall narrative, this thesis is limited in its ability to provide complete understanding of the shifting social and political situation resulting from a growing presence of racially-othered migrants in Denmark, and how this social transformation impacts societal representations and understandings of the Danish 'self', the 'other', and the role race plays in both. While I argue as comprehensive a perspective as possible is gained through curator narratives to understand this ongoing situation, as they are important mediators both between stakeholders and of knowledge deriving from cultural representation, their accounts are positioned and shaped by their own, sometimes competing, identities, past experiences, and education (Acord, 2010; Bourdieu, 1977; Hall, 2020). As it relates to the research question, my positionality poses a challenge to interpreting curator statements of their navigation practices to portray migrants. Holmes (2020) writes "the term positionality both describes an individual's worldview and the positions they

adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (p. 1). While my perspective as an American benefits my ability to see how, what Stoler (2016) describes as, processes of colonial aphasia blind curators to the ways their actions sometimes counter their stated aims to challenge Western centrism and migrant stereotypes, I am limited by my own ignorance to the experience of racialized migrants in Denmark as a white, Western raised and educated woman. Such a limitation is embedded in my choice to distinguish myself from the migrant identity despite having immigrated to Denmark for my education. Furthermore, my normative point of departure into the topic of this thesis is informed by my cultural identity and education, by which I unconsciously create-subject positions between myself, curators, migrants, and the reader of this paper, an empowered position I grapple with and, though aim to combat throughout the research process, this thesis is limited by these factors.

1.4 Analysis Outline

As described, the analysis is divided into three Danish cultural movements. At the end of each chapter, a brief discussion, as per the research aims, summarizes the changing political dynamics throughout the movement and, when relevant, how they were navigated by curators in their attempts to represent migrants in their exhibitions. These findings are then tied to the overarching thesis narrative.

The first movement ‘*Establishing a Symbolic Political Order: The Danish Art Scene*’ observes the gradual implementation of welfare state principles in cultural policy beginning after World War II and lasting until the late 1990s/early 2000s. Through Bourdieu’s (1977; 1986) lens, this chapter introduces relevant ‘habitus’ including the Danish Ministry of Culture, the Danish Arts Foundation, the private New Carlsberg Foundation, and the Danish National Gallery and describes their relative ‘capital’ which benefits their ability to influence existing political dynamics to achieve their aims. Meanwhile, the critical and contemporary artistic approaches developing in the international art scene and emerging in Denmark in the second movement are discussed. Understanding of this movement relies on Peter Duelund’s 2001 state-commissioned analysis of Danish cultural policy. While, I argue it provides a comprehensive understanding of this movement, I treat it also as an empirical object as his 2008 report, funded by Nordic regional

councils, is an arguably more critical analysis of welfare state regulations of culture, understood to enlighten me to state perspectives at the time.

The second movement, inspired by Duelund (2001), is what I call '*Danish Cultural Radicalism*', characterized by a rupture to the previously established symbolic political order of the art scene when the curator emerges in this cultural field (Bourdieu, 1993). Notably, the curators in this thesis are independent, an important consideration to make sense of their 'processes of optation' for certain tactics and strategies to navigate art scene politics (Van Velsen, 1978; De Certeau & Rendall, 1984). The political shifts of this movement are accessed through the 'critical curator narrative', elaborated below, of Tone Olaf Nielsen in which she narrates her curatorial projects as means to challenge previous migrant exclusion and silencing when returning to Denmark in 2002 until 2020.

The third, and current, cultural movement is, I argue, a '*Reconstitution of the Symbolic Political Order*', accessed through the critical curator narratives of independent artists and curators Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich. Beginning in 2022 with plans into 2026, their ongoing exhibition '*In the Past We Made History*' is described as an 'alternative archive' which aims to inscribe migrant histories into the Danish national archive. Similarly to the second period, curator use of tactics and strategies to navigate field politics enlighten us to those politics and curators' relative position to other social agents in the Danish art scene (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984).

2. Establishing the Symbolic Political Order: The Danish Art Scene

Through Bourdieu's (1993) lens, the Danish cultural field itself is created through the interaction of various habitus. This chapter identifies and describes the backgrounds, norms, and values of the Danish Ministry of Culture, the Danish Arts Foundation, the private New Carlsberg Foundation, and cultural institutions like the Danish National Gallery (SMK) (Collyer et al., 2017; Bourdieu, 1977). The symbolic political order of this cultural field is established and influenced by these agents whose efforts are strengthened, in Bourdieu's (1986) understanding, by their relative capital, enabling each to according their place in the political hierarchy, influence these politics to achieve their aims. This chapter tracks how the implementation of welfare state principles in cultural policy and guiding funding schemes aims to increase previously excluded social groups' accessibility and relatability to art and culture; while 'immigrants' are listed among these—not yet assumed the racial other—, state measures do not account for race as a factor of exclusion in an 'ethnically homogeneous Denmark'. As it relates to the research aims, this chapter identifies how art scene politics at this time silenced the existence of racially distinct groups in Danish culture and in society broadly.

2.1 An Institutionalized Cultural Field

Postwar Denmark experienced a “social-democratic zeitgeist” in which the welfare state involved itself more in areas of health, education, and culture (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016). The Social Democratic party was instrumental in forming the fabric of the highly institutionalized Danish cultural field through the establishment of a cultural policy based on principles of inclusion and egalitarianism (Duelund, 2001; Lunde Jørgensen, 2016). Social Democratic minister Julius Bomholt spearheaded an effort to make art and culture more accessible to previously excluded children, young people, seniors, laborers, and immigrants (Duelund, 2001). At the time, the term immigrant was interpreted to describe those culturally similar to Danes, as will be addressed later in the chapter (ibid.). Such an agenda prompted the establishment of the Danish Ministry of Culture in 1961 (Duelund, 2001; Lunde Jørgensen, 2016).

2.1.1 State Institutions: Background, Norms, & Values

The Danish Ministry of Culture was created to provide legal, administrative, financial, and institutional frameworks to structure and expand Danish culture expressed through art, theater,

libraries, archives, museums, and higher education among a range of others (Duelund, 2001). For instance, it set copyright regulations, as aligned with welfare state principles, to protect economic rights and moral interests of independent artists, an approach not often seen in Western countries (ibid.). However, the ministry has historically prioritized elite cultural institutions in its distribution of cultural funding, those whose purpose, as outlined in cultural policy, is to preserve and promote Danish cultural heritage and state-sponsored notions of nationhood (Duelund, 2001; Hansen et al., 2019; Jensen, 2019). Through Hall's (1997) understanding, such state authority over culture by way of political structures gives the ministry ample power to establish hegemonic codes for understanding Danish national identity, possibly through representation of what it is not. This degree of authority exemplifies, through Bourdieu's (1986; 1993) lens, the state's significant levels of economic and symbolic capital, placing the Ministry of Culture at the top of the field hierarchy for most of this movement.

Aware the risk this "seat of political power" poses to the ministry becoming an "arbiter of taste" and producer and legitimator of knowledge, it established a foundational 'arm's length principle' to safeguard its commitment to cultural pluralism and freedom of cultural expression (Greenberg et al., 1996; Duelund, 2001, p. 49). While inhibiting politicians from influencing "the arts through political means," apart from their general engagement in public discourse, the ministry "sets objectives, financial frameworks, subsidy arrangements, and organizational structures" (Duelund, 2001, p. 49). For example, it creates independent art councils and boards with diverse stakeholder perspectives tasked with distributing funds set aside specifically for arts and culture (Duelund, 1995). Seen through the lens of Bourdieu's (1977) habitus, the institutional disposition frames itself as a proponent of the freedom and independence of publicly-funded cultural institutions, groups, and individuals.

This egalitarian self-understanding is mirrored in the public Danish Arts Foundation, established in 1964 to fund things like the decoration of public spaces and travel and labor costs of individual cultural practitioners in effort to advance Danish creative arts (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016). Practitioners receive a sum matching that of a "skilled worker's average wage"; today, 50,000 Danish kroner is allotted each year to these actors for periods from one to five consecutive years (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016, p. 17; Duelund, 2001; Interview Tina). Lunde

Jørgensen (2016) describes this foundation as guided by what she calls a ‘familial logic’ when determining which cultural pursuits to fund, those reflecting ‘family values’ understood as national ideologies which, during the mid 1960s, reflected predominantly cultural norms of the Danish elite (Duelund, 2001).

Initial acts by the Ministry of Culture to increase cultural accessibility to excluded groups was to reduce costs, improve advertising, and tour central cultural institutions displaying Danish ‘familial’ aesthetics of “national tradition, identity, and history,... [and] norms” in addition to fine art historically displayed in these institutions (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016; Duelund, 2001, p. 42). Attendance did not improve as expected since excluded groups felt unrepresented in exhibitions and did not relate to “nonunderstandable fine art” that had been appreciated by and tailored to society’s privileged audiences (Bakke, 1988; Duelund, 2001, 42-43; Langsted, 1990). This sparked an opposition movement led by Peter Rindal in 1964, prompting the ministry to re-evaluate its strategy to uphold egalitarian principles (Duelund, 2001). The ministry introduced what Duelund lists as the three pillars of Danish cultural policy: cultural democracy, decentralization, and instrumentalization.

Cultural democracy or the respect for cultural pluralism, was written into policy in the late 1960s, “guaranteeing the population’s full range of activities for creativity,...self-expression,” and cultural participation (Duelund, 2001, p. 43-44). Following suit, logics guiding the Danish Arts Foundation shifted to support projects promoting professional, artistic, and civic values as well as projects meant to communicate a message. One of these projects guided by this latter logic was the foundation’s voiced interest in producing an “unpretentious publication” to support “art for all” (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016, p. 115). Contradictorily, through Bourdieu’s (1977) lens, the habitus of this foundation includes criticism for slighting beneficiaries who produce ‘illegitimate’ projects and derail the goal of advancing “artistic quality,” a contrast to its egalitarian aims and arm’s length principle (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016, p. 116).

2.1.2 Cultural Institutions

As it is the responsibility of the state to preserve the nation’s cultural heritage in Denmark’s Royal Theatre, Royal Library, National Museum, and National Gallery, public funding has

historically prioritized these central cultural institutions (Bille Hansen & Duelund, 1994). State influence over these institutions extends beyond economic support to political regulation by which cultural policy is used to determine the political function of museums as cultural mediators and influence their practices (Jensen, 2019). Susanne Krogh Jensen (2019) writes Danish museums have been “regulated by comprehensive legislation since 1958, creating statutory benchmarks for the definition of museum work,” legislation “[f]ew other countries in the world have” (Jensen, 2019, p. 468). In her work looking at Danish museum hiring norms for ‘museumsinspektører’ (museum inspectors) between 1964 and 2018, she states those with “practical expertise...in mediation” of art and culture and educated in disciplines of archeology, ethnology, ethnography, history, art history, and natural history were prioritized candidates during the time of this cultural movement (ibid., p. 477). She explains in 1964, museum inspectors were the only academic staff, only shifting to require managers of “state-subsidized museums to [be] academically skilled” in disciplines described above in 1984, thus “suggesting the development of a common definition of the required education for museum professionals” was determined by the state (Law 291, 1984, § 11, sec. 1.7 in Jensen, 2019, p. 479). Interestingly, the Ph.D. was rejected as too theoretical for museum work, a contrast to the international art scene in which use theory in postmodern artistic approaches was on the rise (Statens Museumsnævn 1996 in Jensen, 2019; Hall, 1997; Foster, 2023).

2.1.2.1 Developing International Trends

In 1955, Arnold Bode conceptualized and curated *documenta 1*, an international art biennial, in Kassel to exhibit modern art kept out of Germany during WWII (documenta, 2025; Duelund, 2001). A new precedent for this biennial was set by the Swiss exhibition designer Harald Szeemann in his 1972 *documenta 5* exhibition conceptualized as an open, timeless utopia—“a counterweight to the unfree nationalistic state”—that expanded beyond confines of the museum to connect the exhibition to “the outside world,” in turn making “social contradictions visible in the museum” (Greenberg et al., 1996, p. 5). This show built on Szeemann’s earlier postmodern institutional and ideological critiques present in his 1969 exhibition ‘*When Attitudes Become Form*’ which challenged normative exhibition structures and changed the relationship between curator, artist, and institution, in which the curator took on a more authorial role (Davis, 2023; Greenberg et al., 1996; Wolfe, 2021). As mentioned, his work set a new precedent regarding both

the role of the curator and curation, and use of art for social and political intervention (Greenberg et al., 1996; documenta, 2025; Foster, 2023).

Conversely, in Denmark cultural institution exhibitions promoted archival continuity aligning with traditional Danish national and historical aesthetics, simply chosen, organized, and mediated by museum inspectors educated in disciplines regulated by the state (Rubantseva & Hoffman, 2020; Jensen, 2019; Hansen, et al., 2019). While the state's prioritization of cultural institutions functions as an asset for these institutions, conceptualized as Bourdieu's (1986) social and economic capital, it is tied up in institutional adherence to state conditions. In Bourdieu's terms, influence over the habitus of cultural institutions is conceptualized as the state's symbolic capital (1977; 1986; Schirone, 2023).

2.1.3 Decentralization and Racial Recognition

Returning to the ministry pillars, Duelund describes decentralization was used to increase accessibility and practically implemented through a “fifty-fifty state-subsidy model” by which the state invested equal amounts into the establishment and operation of rural cultural institutions as it provided to those existing in metropolitan areas (Duelund, 2001, p. 42). Aligning with the ‘subsidiarity’ principle, this policy implies “decisions on cultural policy are best made as close as possible to the citizens concerned,” so agricultural cooperatives, folk high schools, and trade unions facilitated artistic activities (ibid., p. 45; Irjala and Eikb 1996). While accounting for excluded groups living in rural areas, Duelund's report is absent of ways previously excluded racially diverse groups were aided by ministry strategies of cultural democracy. Despite his inclusion of immigrants as an excluded group, he states Denmark was “still an ethnically homogeneous country” in 2001 (Duelund, 2001, p. 35).

The narrative of ethnic homogeneity in 2001 contradicts the existing racial diversity having resulted from waves of Danish immigration by guest workers from Turkey, Pakistan, and Morocco during the 1960s and 70s, by asylum seekers from Iran, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Palestine in the 1980s and 90s, and by another wave of asylum seekers from Iraq, Somalia, Syria, and Afghanistan in the early 2000s, to name a few (Andreassen, 2013; Bailey-Morley & Kumar, 2022). Through Stoler's (2016) concepts, this process of colonial aphasia occludes Denmark's

racially diverse landscape at this time. In turn, it functions to excuse the lack of welfare state measures to account for race as a factor of exclusion from cultural access and representation if, according to this accepted fallacy, racial minorities do not exist in Denmark. In this sense, the welfare state's adherence to principles of egalitarianism and equality were unscathed since, through cultural policy and funding, the state did implement measures fostering equal access to previously excluded groups. However, as Larsen (2011) describes, the word 'equality' in Denmark connotes 'sameness'; from this understanding, fostering equal access and representation of those distinct from the Danish racial majority was not the prerogative of the state, nor, based on Duelund's report, was acknowledging them as members of the Danish population at all. Written when center to far-right politicians discursively represented the non-Western 'ethnic' migrant as a 'deviant' or 'threat' to Danish ideologies and norms, campaigning on anti-immigrant sentiments and restrictive policies prompts me to question the relationship between Duelund's occlusion of existing ethnic and racial diversity in Denmark and his report being commissioned by a government arguably intolerant of non-western migrants (Horwood, 2024; Bailey-Morley & Kumar, 2022).

2.1.4 1980s Conservatism, Instrumentalization, and Private Foundations

The third pillar Duelund identifies as instrumentalization in the late 1980s was the use of cultural funds for economic stimulation (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016). Soon after, however, ministers grew concerned this would sabotage the legitimacy of "professional arts" by creating a 'citizen-wage' when allowing "the unemployed to engage in whatever arts activities that they might choose," resulting in its discontinuation (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016; Duelund, 2001, p. 47). Conservative efforts to get away from the instrumentalization of cultural policy and funds "for social, economic, and national political purposes" saw a return of "artistic policy and government support for the *fine arts*" (Duelund, 1995, p. 86-90). As mentioned in the introduction, this political conservative wave was happening in other Western countries in the 1980s (Davis, 2023). In the international art scene, trending postmodernism and the increasingly authorial role of curators was criticized for these actors having acquired an "unassailable, guru-like status," catalyzing a return to traditional museum formats to protect fine art fragility (Greenberg et al., 1996, p. 6). In both the Danish and international art scenes, the response to this conservatism was a proliferation of alternative, artist-run galleries like the Danish Overgaden: the Institute of

Contemporary Art which exhibited more experimental “relational art, post-conceptual art, context art and social art” used to examine the world through different theoretical and cultural lenses using “research, critical journalism and archive-like strategies” (Greenberg et al., 1996; Foster, 2023; Overgaden, 2025; Eliassen, 2018; Ustvedt 2012, p. 7). Decrease in public cultural funding created a window for private foundations supporting the arts to take a more central role in the cultural field, understood as a shift away from the Danish cultural field’s institutionalized symbolic political order.

In Denmark, “Private foundations are perceived to be extremely closed and immensely powerful due to their control of significant funds” (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016, p. 24). Understood through Bourdieu's lens, private foundations with significant economic capital and growing symbolic capital are able to largely influence art’s role in society and audience knowledge informed by art exhibition discourses (1986; Hall, 1997). One such foundation is the New Carlsberg Foundation created in 1902 to support and exhibit Danish visual arts (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016). Its logics overlap with the more recent ones informing the Danish Arts Foundation to in turn fund projects with “professional, artistic, communicative and civic value” to appeal to “wider societal beliefs” as a means to legitimate this foundation as a “support[er] for the arts” (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016, p. 24). Unlike the public foundation, the New Carlsberg Foundation invokes an additional emotional/humanistic logic guiding its support for projects aimed at bringing people closer to their “inner humanity” (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016, p. 68). Through Bourdieu’s (1977) understanding, habitus of this private foundation, while guided by overlapping logics with the Danish Arts Foundation, supports art and fosters notions of common humanity, in this sense more likely to support the ever-increasing racial minority and their representation in Danish art and culture.

2.1.5 The transitional period of ‘Political Colonization’

In his 2008 report, funded by the public intergovernmental Nordic Ministers of Culture and the Nordic Culture Fund, Duelund adds to his list of three pillars for Danish cultural policy a fourth deemed *political colonization* lasting from 1995 to 2007—thus a transitional politics between the first and second chapters. In contrast with his 2001 report suggesting the period after instrumentalization encompassed state deterrence from use of cultural funding for economic,

social, and political purposes, his 2008 report suggests Danish cultural policy, while encouraging private investment and reduced state regulation, contradictorily shows state political regulation of culture increased in state earmarking of funds for “specified and politically defined purposes” such as the “revitaliz[ation of] the national dimension in cultural policy in order to strengthen the national identity of the people and promote social cohesion in an answer to globalisation, migration and individualisation” (Duelund, 2008, p. 17). Such political regulation of culture fuels the tension between state motivations behind its political and financial cultural practices and its adherence to welfare principles of egalitarianism like cultural democracy and its arm’s length principle. Duelund notes that while rising nationalist sentiments and their institutionalization in cultural policy was not new, the rapid rate with which it occurred this time was unprecedented.

2.2 Status of the Political Order

This chapter has identified the relevant institutions, described their institutional legacies, norms, and values, and illustrated how the hierarchy of power or the Danish cultural field’s established symbolic order for the majority of this movement is structured. With state institutions ranking above private foundations and cultural institutions, this cultural field is understood as highly institutionalized by the welfare state. Guided by egalitarian principles of cultural pluralism and the arm’s length principle to offset state power over culture and art, these institutions aim to encourage artistic freedom while still empowered to facilitate the improvement of cultural representation and access to previously excluded groups. In practice however, these institutions have acted as arbiters of taste to promote cultural expression reflecting Danish cultural heritage and state-sponsored notions of nationhood, representations visible in cultural institutions dependent on public funding and controlled by cultural policies. As it relates to the overall thesis narrative, Duelund’s state-commissioned report reflects state occlusion of existing Danish racial diversity resulting in nonacknowledgment of this marginalized group as targeted for increased representation and access in the art scene, in turn reinforcing the dominant narrative of an ethnically homogeneous Danish national identity. As the presence of the racially othered in Denmark continued to rise, the period of political colonization observed more explicit state political regulation of culture in its attempts to revitalize traditional Danish representations. However, its decreased cultural funding is a window of opportunity for private foundations to exercise increased influence over culture and art, and thus how subjects represented in them are

understood by society. Guided by emotional/humanistic logics, these foundations are perhaps more likely to accommodate growing racial diversity by supporting projects that represent these groups. It is these political shifts curators navigate in the next movement.

3. Danish Cultural Radicalism

This chapter analyzes the movement of Danish Cultural Radicalism and its destabilizing effect on the symbolic political order of the Danish cultural field established in the previous movement. As it relates to the research question, I identify the political dynamics of this movement and their shift through the narrative of independent curator Tone Olaf Nielsen based on her use of tactics and strategies to navigate her interactions with previously described institutions (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984). The politics of the transitional period ‘political colonization’ are those which Tone navigates in the first two contemporary art exhibitions discussed. However, her navigational practices changed as a result of more extreme decreases to public cultural funding in 2010 prompting Tone’s reliance on the increasingly powerful private foundations to fund her latter two projects analyzed. Tone’s navigation of these shifting politics of the Danish art scene are informed by, through Bourdieu’s lens (1977; 1986), her habitus during which she acquired an international social network, critical theoretical and tacit curator knowledge, and specialized mediation skills—assets that benefit her attempts to use the critically informed contemporary art exhibition as a means to both challenge previously identified state-sponsored notions of Danish national identity and racial silences and attempt to raise silenced voices of racialized non-Western migrants to accommodate their growing presence in Denmark. Her operations as a specialized critical curator, as will be seen, are understood to not only navigate shifts in art scene politics but also influence them, visible in the shifting practices of cultural institutions later in this movement. As it relates to the thesis narrative, Tone’s narrative is a privileged lens into understanding how she uses cultural expression to foster societal acceptance of growing migrant presence. However, even she, as a member of the Danish racial majority, is influenced by the dominant notion of a homogenous Danish national identity which, when competing with her professional identity as a critical curator, gives rise to contradictions between her stated aims and the outcomes of her exhibitions as it relates to audiences and, more broadly, societal perceptions of migrants deriving from her representations.

3.1 Tone’s Habitus

Bourdieu’s (1977) habitus helps us to account for Tone’s past cultural experiences that shape her conscious and unconscious dispositions informing her approach to her work as an independent

curator (Hall, 2020). This section identifies Tone's relevant experiences to understand her critical curator narrative and narrated navigational practices.

Having acquired a degree in Art History from the University of Copenhagen, in 1997, Tone sought opportunities to study the "relationship between artists, curator and viewers in terms of meaning production and authority" abroad as none existed in Denmark at the time. Her attraction to the U.S. was the country's "different take on power" (Interview Tone). After starting at the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, Tone moved to New York to study at Bard University's Center for Curatorial Studies for a year and returned to Los Angeles to graduate from UCLA's Mary Kay Critical and Curatorial Studies master's program (ibid.). Throughout this time, she honed her curatorial approach "looking at the exhibition as a project,...as a platform," inspired by the work of Belgian curator Barbara Vinderlinden whose poststructuralist 'Laboratorium' reconceptualizes "rigid structures and static exhibition spaces" as "'structure[s] of production', wherein the curator...produce[s] not merely exhibitions but events, hybrid collaborations, books,...[any] combination of media their artists choose" (Forecast, 2025). Nielsen & Petersen (2021) discuss Tone as also drawing on Okwui Enwezor's postcolonial "platforms model" which debuted at the biennial *documenta 11*; this exhibition hosted "conferences, debates, and workshops" in "metropolises of the Global South and the Global North" with the aim to frame these locations as "equally important to the contemporary [art] canon" (p.74). Similarly to what Harald Szeemann's *documenta 5* exhibition did for postmodern art, Enwezor's approach set a precedent for contemporary art exhibitions by conceptualizing a "series of interconnected platforms for political intervention" (Nielsen & Petersen, 2021, p. 74).

Furthermore, Tone describes being inspired by "feminist...and...activist art spaces of the 60s, 70s and 80s." Her theoretical approaches to curation draw on the work of "transnational feminist thinkers" who posit "if you bring people together, you realize you make a platform where it's possible...to see that we're all hit by the same structures" (Interview Tone). During her five years in the U.S., Tone lists events like the rise of the alt-globalization movement and the 9/11 bombing of the Twin Towers and World Trade Center politicized her practice and guided a shift in her curatorial focus toward exploring the "possibility or potential of critical curating for social and political transformation" (ibid.). As informed by the listed inspirations, Tone identifies two

principles that guide her practice: non-particularization and collective solidarity, applied as early as her master's thesis entitled 'Democracy When' arguing community organization and activism is only effective when people are not particularized to "particular identities" (Interview Tone). These notions, she explains, derive from Hardt and Negri's 'Multitude' turn arguing global democracy necessitates recognition of global citizenship and, in turn, observation of global rights (ibid.; Çubukçu, 2005). In this line, she emphasizes "the importance of...offering childcare during meetings if you want to involve women," a strategy learned from "a women's coalition group in Los Angeles" (Interview Tone).

3.1.1 The 'Critical Curator Narrative'

Through Bourdieu's (1977; 1986) lens, Tone's social skills, critical theoretical knowledge, and tacit curator knowledge gained in her habitus function as assets of social and cultural capital that benefit and inform what I describe as her 'critical curator narrative' and associated curatorial approach (Acord, 2010; Rubantseva & Hoffman, 2020). As mentioned, Tone's privileged narrative is positioned and 'curated' for specific purposes, a tactic she uses to navigate her weaker position among more powerful institutions in the Danish cultural field (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984; Van Velsen, 1978; Hall, 2015; Bourdieu 1993). Through Vigh's (2008) conceptual lens, I argue Tone narrates herself as operating in a 'context of crisis' which she identifies as migrant oppression described as institutionalized discrimination and racial silences identified in the first movement (Interview Tone).

The critical curator narrative, for instance, is visible in her statement, "To look at the metropolitan, you always have to go to the periphery. If you want to learn something about Denmark, you have to go to a different place." When Tone returned to Denmark in 2002 during the cultural period of 'political colonization', she describes being "appalled by the racist discourse and lack of understanding and acknowledgement of a long colonial legacy that Denmark was part of and how that ties into racist discourses, structures, and practices in relation to migration and asylum laws." In the U.S., Tone's Danish cultural identity was molded by an accepted American understanding of race as important in structuring power, a lens through which she views and understands Danish welfare state structures after this experience (Hall, 2020). Through Stoler's (2016) lens, Tone could now identify contemporary "colonial

configurations,” though different from those operating during Danish imperialism, as “specialized lexicons of legal, social, and political terms, concepts, and...vocabularies” used to incite societal antagonism against migrants and in turn oppress the racialized other in Denmark, what Mouffe (2014) might describe as a struggle between enemies (p. 19). When such migrant representations “acquire an air of social and existential constancy,” they are internalized and routinized by even those targeted by them, making it a context of crisis (Vigh, 2008, p. 12).

To intervene in this contextualized crisis, Tone applies her acquired knowledge to conceptualize the exhibition as a “platform from where the voices of...migrants could be heard,...[those] deliberately silenced in our system, as a means to challenge migrant occlusion identified in the first movement (Interview Tone). Through this framing, Tone narrates the use of her privilege as her ability and thus obligation to work against migrant oppression in this narrated context (Interview Tone; Vigh, 2008). This framing also serves to justify tensions resulting from either her internal dissonance as member of the Danish racial majority adjusting to increased racial diversity in the country, or as limited actions by a weaker actor whose contradictions are explained by political structures that move (Vigh, 2008).

3.2 *‘Minority Report’*

In 2004, Tone and four other curators were invited to create an exhibition for the first ever international Aarhus Festival of Contemporary Art (Interview Tone). Through Bourdieu’s (1986) lens, Tone’s social and cultural capital benefitted her ability to catch the attention of this festival interested in drawing the diverse audiences her use of popular contemporary trends might attract (Acord, 2010). She describes this exhibition as an artistic investigation into “how racism at this point had become not only institutionalized but socially legitimized through political structures, the rise of extreme right parties in Denmark, and visual representations of criminalized and refugized asylum seekers and migrants.” At the time, despite accusations of migrant intolerance, “Denmark officially repudiated...having grown more xenophobic, racist, and discriminatory,” prompting curators to pose the question: “When did the term ‘ethnicity’ replace the term ‘race’ in Denmark?,” directly responding to claims of Danish ethnic homogeneity (Minority, 2004). Although he described Denmark in this way, Duelund also argued imminent ethnic

diversification amid rising globalization would pose “one of the most significant challenges to the general-welfare conception of cultural policy in Denmark” (p. 35).

The way the festival board, with members from the Ministry of Culture's regional council, responded to this challenge was to require curators to remove ‘racism’ from the exhibition’s original title ‘Deconstructing Racism’ (Minority, 2004; Interview Tone). Through Stoler’s (2016) lens, I understand this as a process of colonial aphasia by which race and its operation in Denmark are obstructed (Minority, 2004). Tone and others were tactical in their navigation of this political regulation to, while changing the title, use the exhibition itself to discuss and engage audiences on topics of migrant intolerance manifesting as racism (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984; Stoler, 2016). To do so, she drew on Vanderlinden’s and Enwezor’s approaches to curate an exhibition that combined visual art, film, lectures, and workshops among other mediums and collaborated with over 150 local and international artistic, cultural, academic and political practitioners from the Global North and South (Minority, 2004).

Through Bourdieu’s lens, Tone’s knowledge of critical theories and curatorial approaches, and her wide social network acquired in her habitus, are forms of capital that benefitted her ability to curate this exhibition and achieve her desired project outcomes despite state regulation (1997; 1986). In Hall’s (1997; 2020) understanding, Tone used multiple ‘signs’ to construct an exhibition discourse that would encourage and foster audience engagement with exhibition themes and challenge antagonistic hegemonic migrant representations she describes. Such methods aimed to facilitate dialogue between “proponents of immigration stop, assimilation, and a homogeneous Denmark...and proponents of immigration, pluralistic integration, and a multiethnic Denmark” (Minority, 2004). Understood through Mouffe (2014) and Karpantschhof & Mikkelsen’s (2017) lenses, the manifest contentious interactions can turn a struggle between enemies to that of one between adversaries if opposing parties can recognize the legitimacy of the other’s existence and shared human experience and desires. In line with Van Velsen’s (1978) argument, conflict is a ‘normal’ rather than ‘abnormal’ part of social progress” (p. 129).

3.3 *'Rethinking Nordic Colonialism'*

Prior to the next project discussed in her narrative, Tone partnered with Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen, an independent Danish curator who had similarly left Denmark to start a Berlin-based curatorial practice on queer and feminist issues, topics Tone states complimented her focus on class, race, and ethnicity "amazingly." In a past interview, the curatorial team 'Kuratorisk Aktion' describe drawing inspiration from "project curation, feminist art spaces, art activism in New York or the LGBT-Queer scene in Berlin," informing my conceptualization of Fred's use of the critical curator narrative (Jakobsen, 2021).

Their 2006 exhibition 'Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts' was an investigation of "systemic discrimination and racial silences in relation to minorities and Indigenous people in the Nordic region, highlighting the collective amnesia surrounding Nordic colonial history" (Ellegaard, 2024, p. 9). Tone narrates the context that gave rise to this exhibition stating there was "this idea that the catastrophic race dynamics and principles of colonialism" unfolding in "the global wealthy north was unthinkable at the time." To portray her work as a necessary intervention, she narrates it as embedded in the contextualized crisis of Danish colonial amnesia that results in an obstruction of contemporary colonial configurations like discrimination against marginalized groups in the Nordic region, expanding her scope in this project to include all postcolonial groups, argued by critical scholars to include migrants (Vigh, 2008; Achiume, 2019; Sadiq & Tsourapas, 2021). Through Stoler's (2016) understanding, these processes of colonial aphasia make addressing such marginalization difficult, hence Tone's aim to call out these silences in the exhibition.

Through Bourdieu's (1977) lens, Tone again draws on her knowledge of critical curatorial approaches learned in their habitus to apply Enwezor's 'platforms model' and Vanderlinden's 'Laboratorium' to conceptualize the exhibition as a constellation of platforms in both "former colonies and home ruling territories of the Scandinavian colonial powers" (Ellegaard, 2024, p. 11). Exhibited in Reykjavik, Nuuk, Thorshavn, and Rovaniemi for Acts 1 through 4, the exhibition discourse consisted of "an exhibition, a film programme, [and] discursive events and happenings" with which audiences could engage in meaning-making processes and dialogue with its practitioners and other audience members (ibid., p. 11). The final act was the launch of

“a website and DVD” documenting the project shown in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo and Helsinki (Ellegaard, 2024, p. 11).

Benefitted by her social network and cross-cultural mediation skills, conceptualized by Bourdieu (1986) as her capital, Tone and Fred collaborated with 56 international artists, theorists, politicians, and activists like British sociologist and post- and decolonial expert Paul Gilroy (Ellegaard, 2024; Interview Tone). Tone emphasizes the importance of collaborating with practitioners “from the so-called global south...who had experienced colonialism” and gone through decolonization processes, like Kalaaleq-Danish artist, writer and photographer Pia Arke who, Tone argues, provided necessary insight as to how to challenge contemporary colonial operations in Denmark (Louisiana, 2025). She explains collaborators were...

...surprised that they were even invited to look at colonialism within the Nordic region because there was a kind of...blind spot...nobody was paying attention to this history. And this was at a point where you had post- and decolonial practices and theories unfolding for the past 25 years, but nobody had looked at the Nordic region systematically (Interview Tone).

In Tone's framing of her work as an obligatory use of her privilege to intervene into these acts of obstruction, what she describes as a 'blind spot', she creates subject-positions between the curators, their postcolonial collaborators, represented marginalized groups, and audiences (Vigh, 2008; Hall, 2020). These positions reflect the inherent authority Tone has relative to those she collaborates with, making visible the power dynamics of representing 'difference' (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, she describes a '65-35 methodology' for collaboration she uses in this and other projects in which “65% of participants...had to be non-white, non-straight, non-male...to get away from tokenism,” narrated as aligned with her principle of non-particularization.

Requiring a quota of marginalized collaborators, although narrated as adhering to her critical curator narrative, is, however, tokenistic and contradicts the notion of non-particularization (Bourdieu, 1977). Stoler (2016) proposes examination of such tensions to identify the structures which create circumstances for them to occur. Despite Tone's intent to challenge the occlusion of Nordic colonialism and its contemporary configurations, this tension enlightens us to her spliced self in which, as a member of the dominant Danish culture, she is caught ignoring or ignorant to the ways her Danish cultural identity shapes her predispositions and can contrast with her professional identity as a critically informed curator. These tensions show, despite her concerted

effort to challenge it, even Tone may be ignorant to the ways she is affected by Danish colonial aphasia (Stoler, 2016). For this reason, Stoler warns against certainty of what contemporary colonial configurations look like today. She suggests highlighting these tensions is an opportunity “to ask what implicit knowledge makes up colonial common sense” in Denmark during this period (2016, p. 21).

As this exhibition occurred toward the end of the period Duelund (2008) calls ‘political colonization’, I question if the conceptualization of the exhibition in motion was not only an artistic decision but a tactic to navigate the political dynamics of the Danish cultural field in which, already limited by lower levels of economic capital, Tone may not have received funding for a project reckoning with state revitalization of traditional Danish nationalism in the Danish cultural field (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984). Funded by the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art and the Nordic Council of Ministers which also funded Duelund’s arguably more critical analysis of Danish cultural policy, I pose this inquiry and return to it in the third movement. To achieve her stated project aims to reckon with Danish colonial aphasia despite traveling the exhibition, I argue, was to launch Act 5 in Copenhagen (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984).

3.4 Trampoline House

Tone states her project ‘Trampoline House’ “started out as an art project” but “grew into a NGO” to function as an “antidote to the degradation of [migrant] life that happens in the [asylum] camp” (Interview Tone). In late 2008 and early 2009, she and artists Morton Goll and Joachim Hamou engaged in a “series of workshops with critical, socially engaged art students,” four asylum seekers, and other artists to brainstorm what became an “independent refugee justice community center” (ibid.). Using her cross-cultural mediation skills as a specialized curator (Acord, 2010), Tone and others collaborated to conceptualize Trampoline House to address the crisis she describes here:

The problem with [the Danish immigration] system is that we can keep people in the asylum or deportation centers indefinitely...so people are being broken down physically and mentally from living in this limbo of uncertainty, of not knowing, of having years of their lives stolen from them (Interview Tone).

Jacobsen (2013) states in these centers, migrants perceive their “everyday life as a life where nothing happens” as they are conditioned to believe it is no longer “meaningful or interesting” (p. 81). Describing Trampoline House as an “antidote” to this, she frames her co-founding of this center as her obligatory action to use her “unequal rights, life situation and privilege” to create a space where “displaced people,...Danish citizens and international residents, who think that the Danish asylum and refugee policy has become too tight” can gather and organize against it, as informed by her principle of collective solidarity (Trampoline, 2025). Tone narrates this crisis as a context in the Danish immigration system when migrants routinize and internalize its consequences, functioning to justify Tone’s artistic intervention into it (Jacobsen, 2013; Vigh, 2008).

Trampoline House was structured around pillars of capacity building, legal counseling, and empowerment, offering “internships for asylum seekers, language classes, legal counseling, medical counseling, social events, campaigning,” a cafe, “kitchen,...library and reading zone,...hair & tailor salon, the IT zone, the multi zone (meetings, classes, workshops, film screening, live music, and performance)” (Interview Tone; Jacobsen, 2013, p. 33). It also hosted women's and children's clubs so “women could participate in activities and get legal counseling without getting disturbed” (Interview Tone). The services offered, through Bourdieu’s (1986) lens, are guided by Tone’s cultural capital consisting of knowledge of Hardt and Negri’s argument for observation of the rights of global citizens thus informing her compensation for restricted rights of migrants in Denmark (Interview Tone). She also emphasizes a house rule banning questions like “where you're from, ‘Why did you flee?’ ‘Do you think of ever going back home to your country?’” informed by her narrated principle of non-particularization.

Initially financed by a grant from the private OAK Foundation guided by logics to benefit socially vulnerable groups, Trampoline House was sustained by “single donations from private people and public and private foundations supporting social initiatives” until its closure in 2020 (OAK, 2025; Trampoline, 2025; Interview Tone). Soon after its establishment in 2009, Lunde Jørgensen, (2016) explains around 2010, public cultural funding was drastically decreased, affecting even prioritized central institutions. As a result, the steadily rising importance of private foundations significantly grew during this period (Lunde Jørgensen, 2016). While being

supported by private foundation grants from the New Carlsberg Foundation and others, Tone explains, “It’s just very difficult to finance [these projects], because almost no foundations will support the running of permanent art projects” (Jakobsen, 2021). As an independent curator whose livelihood depends on constant curation of innovative critical contemporary projects, her desire to sustain the art-project-turned-NGO Trampoline House was limited by her limited, in the Bourdieusian (1986) sense, economic capital. Her strategy, now working from her own locus, was to navigate these politics to sustain this project was thus to garner other means of support (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984).

Jakobsen (2013) explains in Denmark, “Humanitarian migrants over 18...enter into a contract with the[ir] asylum center” to perform “daily duties, courses, and activities...consist[ing]...of cleaning and repairing the...asylum center” (p. 8). After contributing internally, some can switch to external internships, for example, with Trampoline House (Jakobsen, 2013). Though described as an antidote to camp life, Trampoline House benefitted from free migrant labor and was criticized for “turn[ing] refugees into perfect labor subjects for the Danish labor market,” highlighting a tension deriving from Tone’s conflicting aims, what Stoler calls her spliced self (2016; Interview Tone). In this sense, Tone becomes enslaved by the critical curator narrative when her practices to sustain her projects contradict her stated aims to challenge structural oppression of migrants in Denmark. As a member of the dominant culture, Tone occupies a position where it’s “possible...to look away” from the way her actions contradict her narrative, what Stoler (2016) refers to as an “imperial disposition of disregard” (p. 9). By looking at the structures that give rise to tensions, as Stoler (2016) suggests, welfare state institutionalized cultural policy and funding schemes and short-term foundations guided by what appears to be humanitarian logics both limit Tone’s ability to be accountable to her critical artistic expression at the same time as she advocates for acceptance of a growing racial minority group in Denmark. These structures in turn make the task of sustaining a long-term contemporary artistic venture, such as creating a migrant community center, difficult in this cultural field.

3.5 CAMP: Center for Art on Migration Politics

While distinct organizations, CAMP: Center for Art on Migration Politics (CAMP) was a dedicated art space that operated within Trampoline House from 2015 to 2020, beginning

production in 2013 (CAMP, 2020). Setting the scene for this project, Tone and Fred state, “The colonial dynamics of the past are still made invisible and can therefore unrestrictedly reproduce themselves into the present as waves of nationalism, racism, and sexism – aimed...to an extremely high degree at refugees, immigrants, and migrant workers” (Hansen & Nielsen, 2020, p. 5). After “nearly a decade of work on Nordic colonialism,” the curators switched their focus to “migration politics, as it is in the Global North’s reactions to the large flows of refugees and migrants that we most clearly see coloniality unfolding today” (Hansen & Nielsen, 2020, p. 5).

Having gotten “critical about site specific curating,” Tone explains she and Fred wanted to...

...look into the possibility of opening a permanent independent space where we could look at the problematic of migration in relation to the colonial legacy that we have been unpacking in previous projects...how colonial structures in the Global North relate to handling migration, asylum, and refugee influx. We wanted to dedicate a whole space to look into that, unpack different aspects of it...and build up a community of audiences...and offer space where we could campaign and develop discourses and imagine an alternative, equitable, and just asylum and migration policy.

Opening a space in Trampoline House aimed to directly connect this exhibition space with “the communities [they were] representing or whose problems [they were] addressing,” a space outside “the art districts” to avoid “a risk of stereotyping and exoticizing the subjects and policies that [they] were looking into” (Interview Tone). Tone again narrates the urgency of this project to intervene into the contextualized crisis of migrant oppression framed as akin to colonial oppression as a means to justify the purpose of CAMP (Vigh, 2008).

Between 2015 and 2020, CAMP exhibitions investigated migration topics of asylum camp life, migration journeys, borderlands, deportation regimes, comparative media coverage and representation of conflicts, labor migration and migrant rights, intersecting migrant identities, and immigration and integration processes (Hansen & Nielsen, 2020). As in her previous projects, Tone conceptualized CAMP as “a discursive platform,” hosting panels, hearings, performances, debates and “vernissages with 3-400 people...on Fridays” among others (Jakobsen, 2021). Tone and Fred identify Trampoline House users as the target audience, as Fred described in an interview, they “curated with an asylum seeker in mind...One of [their] curatorial principles was that it should be relevant and accessible to the users of Trampoline House,” so the

curators “tried to avoid too much abstraction, theory and academic jargon” (Hansen & Nielsen, 2020; Jakobsen, 2021). Fred claims, “CAMP was a success right from the start...receiv[ing] international recognition, a lot of publicity and...inquiries from students, journalists, film directors”; in this sense, CAMP had two audiences: house users and combination of “national, local and international art audience, curators, students, researchers, [and] scholars...interested in migration issues and...in [the curators’] specific dedication of a space to this” topic (Jakobsen, 2021; Interview Tone). Tone described the bringing of these two audiences together “was as important as what was on display in the space.”

Through Bourdieu’s (1986) lens, Tone’s position with Trampoline House is conceptualized as her social capital that enables her to house CAMP in the center and continue her use of strategies, as opposed to tactics, to navigate the Danish art scene politics from her own locus (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984). Additionally through this theoretical approach, I consider her and Fred’s specialized curator status cultivated throughout their habitus their growing symbolic capital in part enabling them to gain “international attention” and “success” (Bourdieu, 1977; Schirone, 2023; Acord, 2010). Critical theories and curatorial approaches from Tone’s habitus inform the curators’ desire to make CAMP spatially and intellectually accessible to its described target audience, those historically excluded from cultural access and representation as seen in the first movement. However, the assumption migrants would not understand the exhibition otherwise seems to contrast with Tone’s principle of non-particularization by which Trampoline House users are ‘refugized’ in the sense that they are inferred to not have the capacity to understand critical theory or artistic meaning, a statement I posit derives from the power-inscribed subject-positions curators create when attempting to represent ‘different’ non-Western migrants (Hall, 1997; 2020). Furthermore, this principle guides Tone’s choice for CAMP’s decentralized location as a way to avoid stereotyping and exoticizing migrants. As far as how CAMP exhibitions are informed, I turn to Tone’s use of the ‘laboritorium’ conceptualization and its multiple mediums to foster audience engagement and meaning-making in the next section.

3.5.1 Representation and Audience Interpretation

Tone explains curators tailored exhibitions to migrants by collaborating with “artists who had done the journey themselves” so that house users could “mirror themselves in their

practitioners,” a practice guided by her described 65-35 methodology. Tone also describes the way house users collaborated on CAMP exhibitions by inspiring exhibition topics and guiding tours of the exhibitions. She believes “the genius of placing CAMP within Trampoline House was that the space was primarily the space of refugees and asylum seekers” who brought with them “their expert knowledge about what it feels like to have your rights taken away, stuck in the asylum or integration systems for years,...how it affects the body and psyche, so it feels like you are being killed slowly” (Interview Tone, Jakobsen, 2021).

Although narrated as expert knowledge, the tension mentioned above connoting limited migrant capacity to understand theoretical art contrasts with Tone’s framing of them as “experts”. Her internally conflicting norms in this example are again exemplified when she describes migrants’ voiced concerns as “a cry made in the house,” that, for example, inspired the exhibition ‘We shout and shout but no one listens’ which addressed media amplification of conflicts not “involving black or brown people”; migrants asked, “Why was there no international intervention into Syria when the civil war broke out...and killed millions...of people? Why was nobody looking into the forgotten conflicts in DRC, South Sudan, Sudan, and so forth?” (Interview Tone). To understand the contradictions between migrants portrayed as experts versus crying subjects, Franko (2019) explains the humanitarian “tradition of bearing witness to suffering” creates viewer “dramatic...urgency” (p. 386). In the interest of inquiring about what imperial debris looks like, as Stoler (2016) suggests, I question if migrant representations that reify the dominant “vulnerable asylum seeker” narrative or infantilized migrant stereotypes not only reinforce migrant particularization to these identities, but risk migrant internalization of themselves as oppressed, dependent, less than, contrary to Tone’s voiced intent (Stoler, 2016, p. 32; Jakobsen, 2013). Jakobsen (2013) argues framing migrants as vulnerable and with limited agency reifies their self-perception as helpless despite “not be[ing] as ‘vulnerable’ as the system tries to make them,” not to mention it informs how broader Danish society perceive the ever-growing group of the racially othered in society (p. 91). It is in this way Tone creates subjects-positions between herself (and the privileged dominant Danish group), migrants she attempts to represent, and local audiences (Hall, 2020).

3.5.1.1 Stabilizing 'Race' in the Migrant Experience & Audience Interpretations

In CAMP's 2019 exhibition 'Decolonizing Appearance', curators investigated 'appearance' and the ways it hierarchically classifies, separates, and rules people; the curators wished "challenge this regime" and demand "the right to exist,...the right to matter, like Black Lives Matter, and to be grievable" (Hansen & Nielsen, 2020, p. 40). By this time, Tone had stepped down as co-curator and worked as a curatorial consultant (Interview Tone). This exhibition was curated by Fred and American Nicholas Mirzoeff (Hansen & Nielsen, 2020). A 44-year-old Danish woman visiting the exhibition reflects: "What surprised me a bit was the wall full of black lives matter posters. How is that related to migration and refugee experiences? To me it felt like it started as an American...situation" (Tan, 2019, p. 58). A 45-year-old woman with a Filipino background living in Denmark for 15 years said she was unsure of the message curators wanted to communicate (Tan, 2019, p. 54).

Based on these descriptions, the use of American imagery to address the experience of racialized migrants in Denmark was lost on local audiences (Hall, 2020). While the curators benefitted from her social network to collaborate with curator Mirzoeff, their shared critical curator approach and "colonial common sense" assumptions about race did not seem to transfer to the Danish context (Stoler, 2016). For locals whose cultural identity is influenced, like Tone's, by Danish processes of colonial aphasia, American assumptions about race and its role in power dynamics confused and excluded audiences, as signaled by a Chinese-Singaporean respondent raised in Denmark who said the exhibition created "a bubble of other refugees or international people,...[where] the locals are not involved" (Stoler, 2016; Rodrigues, 2011; Tan, 2019, p. 57). In this instance, Tone is again enslaved by the critical curator narrative and her need to generate new innovative and critically informed projects to obtain funding, even if those projects work to confuse or exclude local audiences from this "bubble" of migrants and internationals, a contrast to her stated aims to foster audience engagement and meaning making (Jakobsen, 2021; Tan, 2019).

As mentioned, migrant collaboration included giving exhibition tours. To do so, they would go through an 8-week 'Talking about art' course to learn communication strategies, attend workshops by researchers and curators, practice public speaking, and contribute to a guide

manuscript (Hansen & Nielsen, 2020). Reflecting on his guided visit, the Chinese-Singaporean respondent wondered whether stories voiced by the guide were the message of the art or “the guide’s opinion,” the latter of which portrayed race relations as matter of fact stating, “This is just how it is. Everything is already set” (Tan, 2019, p. 55-57). In a similar line, an American-German woman living in Denmark reflects,

The voices of refugees come up but how the artist perceives refugees and the problems that come with being a refugee. I don’t feel I heard the refugees’ voice...[The guide’s] language was...saying that the wrongdoing is always from those who are not of colour,...it’s always because of white people. And I thought that was very problematic in terms of creating a dialogue (Tan, 2019, p. 51).

Tone’s predispositions about race, as reflected in the exhibition discourse and guide’s description, led audience members to feel particularized and blamed, deterring them from engaging in cross-cultural dialogue, making visible another tension between Tone’s principles and how her methods worked in practice to inform audience understanding of migrants (Bourdieu, 1977). Notably, informants in Tan’s (2019) study did not attend CAMP events, which she believes may have functioned better than tours to achieve Tone’s desired collective solidarity and non-particularization of both migrants and audience members by the other, a topic returned to in the third movement. Another tension arises from the American-German woman’s claim to not hear refugee voices despite being guided by one. This statement prompts me to question if this resulted from her belief the guide adopted the curators’ critical narrative and was thus silenced, or if the ‘refugee voice’ she heard contrasted with her culturally informed preconceptions of what the refugee voice *should* sound like.

For instance, the Chinese-Singaporean man describes hearing the ‘refugee voice’ as, “Crying for help through the works...want[ing] a chance to...survive and live life like anyone else...[the exhibition] put faces to the news...in this case, you have names to faces, a story behind them,” an approach the Filipino woman describes as “a good path for outreach, for volunteer work, creating awareness” (Tan, 2019, p. 54-56). Tone describes how CAMP’s location forced “you to move through a space full of asylum and refugee identities,” and explains they would in turn ask, “‘How can I get involved in the struggle?’” She says, “It was obvious to say ‘Well, you can become a volunteer at Trampoline House,’” making, as she describes, “the road from engaging in

a topic on a visual level to...an activist level...very short” (Interview Tone). While framed as aligning with a fostering of opportunities to engage in collective solidarity, I question if this approach has another function.

3.5.2 Funding and Support

Fred describes CAMP’s early “international recognition” attracted students, journalists, film directors—“people who ‘just needed a refugee’,” which curators obliged so long as they got “involved as a volunteer in the house one day a week for six months” (Jakobsen, 2021). This example and that of incentivising audience members to get involved described above, while portrayed collective solidarity, functioned to offset the limited resources Tone could acquire amid existing field political dynamics. While the state’s decision to not fund independent projects aimed to get away from creating a ‘citizen’s wage’ in the first movement, it seems this approach serves to restrict projects like Tone’s. The limitations these dynamics create for Tone make us aware of how she, to continue work as an independent curator, sacrifices accountability to the migrants she aims to represent. As a member of the dominant racial group, Tone in this sense occupies what Stoler (2016) calls an imperial disposition of disregard, in which it is possible for her to ignore how she benefits from audience perceptions of migrants as vulnerable, infantilized, and othered in her projects.

As state authority in this field decreased in this movement, central institutions became more autonomous and, as Jensen (2019) explains, hired institutional curators more “diversified and...specialized” in their approach to exhibitions (p. 475). This finding coincides with the CAMP’s invitation for a commission at SMK in 2016 when institutional curators Marianne Torp and Tone Bonnén approached “the expert curators” Fred and Tone to collaborate on a show (Interview Tone). Tone describes the exhibition:

We would literally restage [the first three CAMP exhibitions] in SMK...Parallel to the [to this,] we opened...‘Deportation Regime’ in CAMP. And this was very deliberate. So for the SMK opening which took place in the afternoon, we had a bus bringing people from Trampoline House to SMK—both artists and audiences—to see the show and then we brought the SMK audiences back to CAMP...to participate in the opening.

Tone and Fred’s “expert” curator status is conceptualized through Bourdieu's (1986) lens as social and symbolic capital; together with their cultural capital, these assets contributed to Tone

being invited to curate a CAMP commission at SMK. Through Bourdieu's (1977) lens, this signals a shift away from this institution's habitus, one in which it historically displayed state-sponsored approved narratives as opposed to those critically engaging with the state. Tone describes her tactic to navigate this interaction—from within this dominant institution—was to create a platform to for “silenced and invisibilized asylum seekers and refugees” voice to be heard, one they have historically been under-represented in and excluded from in the first movement (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984). Alternatively, her strategy in her CAMP locus was to “force the institution to look at the alternative institutional building that was happening in Trampoline House and CAMP” (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984; Interview Tone). Stoler's (2016) spliced self enables us to identify the contradiction between this commission and Tone's argument for having CAMP outside the art districts to avoid stereotyping or exoticizing migrant subjects; in this case she prioritized the exposure and funding to sustain her ongoing projects.

Tone explains CAMP funding came from “public and private foundations interested in socially engaged art,” stating further, “We don't get any state funding. We don't get any long term funding”; although, the Danish Arts Foundation is listed as a CAMP benefactor (Hansen & Nielsen, 2020). She does, however, list private foundations “interested in the novelty of the space or a particular project” as supporters of CAMP including the New Carlsberg Foundation, guided by its emotional/humanistic and communicative logics (Interview Tone; Lunde Jørgensen, 2016). She confesses, “It was not possible to apply for funding a second or third time” from private foundations, so in “both CAMP and Trampoline House, in order to secure funds...[they] always had to come up with new projects that would somehow finance the existing process and projects” (Interview Tone). She explains how this unsustainable way of working “creates stress in employees and management,” and that her need to come up with new projects to support Trampoline House's work “with asylum seekers and refugees,...helping them navigate their horrible life situation,” Tone did not prioritize “making sure that staff and interns were thriving” (Interview Tone). While able to employ a strategy from her own locus, through De Certeau & Rendall” (1984) understanding, its visibility made it vulnerable to criticism listed in the previous section on Trampoline House by the decolonial feminist Copenhagen collective Marronage voicing “a critique of the job training and internships” as well as that fact that it was run by two ethnic, white Danes (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984; Marronage, 2025; Interview Tone).

3.6 Reflecting on Danish Cultural Radicalism

As it relates to the research question, Tone's narrative not only enlightens us to the political shifts of the Danish art scene during the movement of 'Danish Cultural Radicalism' but also how she, as the representative curator of this period, navigates these shifts in an attempt to represent migrants in her contemporary art exhibitions. In her 2004 exhibition 'Minority Report', the state, by way of the art festival board, attempts to obstruct the existence of 'racism' in Denmark enabling the maintenance of its egalitarian image simultaneously as it, Tone argues, fosters intolerance of the racialized other of non-Western migrants. Tone's navigation of state regulation was to, while removing 'racism' from the title, use the exhibition discourse as a means to engage audiences in potentially contentious dialogue over the contested issue of race and racism against non-Western migrants. Her navigational practice amid similar politics in her 2006 exhibition 'Rethinking Nordic Colonialism' is to use the contemporary approach that conceptualizes the exhibition as a series of traveling platforms. This enables her to receive regional public funding at the same time as she is unregulated in her curation and is able to engage audiences in conversations of the contested issues like racism which function to 'other' and exclude migrants and other marginalized groups in the Nordic societies. She thus attempts to challenge the Nordic exceptional narrative tied to the welfare state systems of the region.

Tone's narrated navigation of art scene politics after 2010 enlightens us to the continued rise of private foundation influence over Danish cultural expression and decreased state influence. These dynamics are accessed by way of Tone's navigation to rely on private funding to finance her long-term projects. Though able to critically engage the state's anti-immigrant political reaction to the growing presence of racially othered migrants in Denmark, her strategies to fund these projects were not sustained by private short-term funding. To sustain Trampoline House and CAMP, Tone had to both consistently generate new projects and acquire additional resources like volunteers to keep these centers operational. While her migrant representation is narrated as the use of the exhibition as a platform for migrant voices to be heard, she capitalizes on the particularization of migrants to a vulnerable identity when able to acquire volunteers through audience sympathy or researcher interest. While this tension is perhaps the result of existing practical political structures of both the Danish asylum system that enables her to take advantage of unpaid migrant internships, and art scene structures that limit her ability to acquire sustainable

funding, other tensions in her narrative result from an invisible political structure operating within the Danish art scene and society more broadly. Its effect is exemplified when Tone's described critical artistic approach, contrary to her aims, reinforced migrant exclusion when audiences were either confused by exhibited racial assumptions, deterred from engaging in dialogue with migrants when feeling blamed for migrant oppression and exclusion, or when feeling excluded from the bubble of internationals, art personnel, and refugees in the exhibition space. When influenced by her cultural identity, shaped by her U.S. experience, Tone's privileged narrative makes visible the ways members of the dominant racial group are caught in a conflict of internal norms as social transformation resulting from increased immigration by the racialized 'other' impacts their own self-understandings despite efforts to accommodate these social transformations.

Finally, despite being framed as influenced by art scene politics constituted by other social agents, the specialized independent curator, I argue, contributed to catalyzing central cultural institutions to deviate from their, in Bourdieu's (1977) terms, *habitus*. This is supported by SMK's 2016 CAMP commission which, contrary to its previously described institutional practices, critically engaged with welfare state immigration structures, and, with more visibility, has increased potential to bring about new understandings of migrant subjects by broader society. Not to mention, Jensen's (2019) finding regarding the role of institutional curators becoming more "diversified and...specialized," arguably characteristic resembling the specialized independent curator (Jensen, 2019, p. 475). These changes in the practices of cultural institutions as increasingly spaces where contested political topics like growing migrant presence, race, and Danish national identity might be addressed preempt state pushback on cultural institutional autonomy in the next movement.

4. Reconstitution of the Symbolic Political Order

As it relates to the research question, this chapter is an analysis of what I call the ‘Reconstitution of the Symbolic Political Order’ of the Danish cultural field, politics of which are understood through narratives of independent artists and curators Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich whose described navigation enlightens us to increased welfare state political regulation of the art scene. Benefitted by their social networks, knowledge of critical contemporary artistic approaches, and cross-cultural mediation skills, Tina and Kent navigate these political dynamics in their ongoing contemporary art exhibition ‘In the Past We Made History’ as an effort to represent migrants by inscribing occluded migrant histories into the Danish national historical archive. As it relates to the thesis narrative, Tina and Kent react to the ever-increasing presence of the racial minority in Denmark through privileged lenses shaped by Western centrism and a sympathetic lens to view migrants. While narrated as proper approaches to their interactions with migrant collaborators they represent in this project, such perceptions, similar to Tone, reinforce the particularization and marginalization of migrants in Danish society.

4.1 Curator Habitus

Bourdieu’s (1986) habitus suggests curators are informed and shaped by their past experiences, material they engaged with, projects they created, and relations they cultivated, all of which guide their approaches to interacting with others in the Danish cultural field (Bourdieu, 1993). In this sense, Tina Enghoff’s work as a visual artist “focused on critical approaches towards narration, photojournalism, and the notion of evidence alongside initiating projects that revolve around community involvement, collaborations, and site-specific artistic activism” to investigate incarceration and surveillance, the implications of Arctic politics for Greenlandic and Sámi people, and facets related to migration informs her curatorial approach (Enghoff, 2025). Similar to Tone, Tina critically engages the Nordic colonial legacy and, what she narrates as akin to it, “institutional violence of the welfare state, and the power structures of the ‘archive’” (Enghoff, 2025). In her past projects working with socially vulnerable and silenced groups, she describes a principle of generosity of her platform to allow their voices to be heard (Interview Tone). Her experiences attest to her specialized curator status, and her work across Europe, in South Korea and Japan, Turkey and Morocco, and the United States where she obtained her degree from the International Center of Photography in New York attest to her cross-cultural mediation and

communication skills (Enghoff, 2025). She describes her work “addresses...political issues through...art, [something] that is not always so popular” (Interview Tina).

Tina co-curates the analyzed exhibition with Kent Klich, a visual artist and educator born in Sweden and based in Denmark who works with “photography and film, slow journalism, and collaborative methodologies of image-making and representation” (Klich, 2025). His work unpacks the linkages between images and “language, objects, sounds, and documents,” believing “the image does not tell the whole story” (Finissage). Educated in Psychology and photography, he applies this knowledge to narrate the social realities of those affected by colonialism, structural violence, war and conflict, and facets of migration and displacement through various artistic mediums (Klich, 2025). Having grown up with a father who was “a refugee after [the] Second World War,” Kent emphasizes a principle of sensitivity when having collaborated with socially vulnerable groups in his past work (Interview Kent). These themes brought him to “Sweden, Denmark, Mexico, Romania, Palestine/Israel and Russia” to create projects, many of which receiving awards (Klich, 2025). Such acclaim and experiences attest to his specialized curator status, international mediation and communications skills, cultivated social network, and sensitive approach to collaborations with vulnerable groups, an approach shared by Tina based on her similar past experiences and narrations (Klich, 2025; Interview Tina & Kent).

Through Bourdieu’s (1986) conceptual lens, I understand Tina and Kent’s knowledge and application of critical theories—exemplified by their site-specific projects and collaborative community-based approaches—, their cross-cultural communication and mediation skills, their tacit curator knowledge, and their ability to mediate cultural expressions of their exhibitions as their social and cultural capital (Acord, 2010). Similar to Tone, their use of critical theoretical perspectives to structure not just their exhibition approach but also their narratives guides my use of the “critical curator narrative” to describe those of Tina and Kent, a narrative shared to some extent by their primary collaborator on this project Anastasija (Nastja) Kayak.

Nastja is a writer, visual artist, and critical studies scholar based in The Hague who, after collaborating with Tina and Kent on their bachelor’s thesis, contributes to the curator’s current exhibition. Nastja’s youth was divided between Latvia and Denmark, until they moved to the

Netherlands in 2018 (Interview Kent). Their firsthand understanding of Danish immigration and integration infrastructures informs their narration of and contribution to this project. Their poststructural lens guides their artistic focus to represent structures, as opposed to the individuals they structure—migrants, including those of “belonging, language, and violence” (Interview Nastja). In this sense, Nastja’s interactions with migrant collaborators are distinct from Tina and Kent’s based on the different subject-positions they create relative to other collaborators as not a member of the Danish cultural majority (Hall, 1997; 2020). Through Bourdieu’s (1986) lens, I consider the relationship between Nastja and the curators as their social capital that benefitted their curation of this project as well as their knowledge of critical theories, related contemporary artistic approaches, and intimate understanding of the migrant experience Nastja’s social and cultural capital. As discussed in the previous chapter, Tone used the critical curator narrative to embed her project in a context of crisis as a means to garner support, create subject-positions, and justify her tactics and strategies to navigate the politics of the Danish cultural field. These curators similarly contextualize the crisis into which they hope to use their exhibition as a social and political intervention.

4.1.1 A Context of Crisis

Tina narrates the circumstances that gave rise to the exhibition ‘In the Past We Made History’:

Denmark is an extremely racist country, believe it or not, you don't think so. You think it's a liberal country, it is not. I mean people with other skin color, with other backgrounds. I mean it is racist towards Greenlanders, towards black people, towards brown people, towards refugees, everything... It is awful to see... We have a government right now who's supposed to be social democrats, which is like left wing in the eyes of the [United] States. But the way they're thinking is extremely racist, extremely exclusive toward people who don't fit into Danish society.

Through Bourdieu’s (1977) lens, this description builds on Tina’s critique of welfare state structural violence in her habitus when she identifies its current function to exclude racialized groups from the Danish national identity and occlude this racial discrimination through processes of colonial aphasia such as fostering perceptions of liberalism and equality (Stoler, 2016). In a country where equality means sameness, the Danish egalitarian image is unscathed when racially distinct members of the population are excluded from cultural expression (Larsen, 2011). In her critical curator narrative, Tina illustrates this as a contextualized crisis she and Kent’s project intervenes into (Vigh, 2008). She creates subject-positions between herself and me in her aim to

enlighten me to how it is in Denmark, framing it in a way that presumes I may have a false perception of Denmark as liberal and, with my American understanding of race, will be able to understand how race *actually* operates in the country (Hall, 2020).

Tina and Kent's motivation for this exhibition was sparked having heard that Danish "politicians were in Rwanda talking to Rwanda politicians" about the potential to externalize the Danish point of entry for asylum seekers to Rwanda, additionally moving the asylum centers in which they await their case verdict to this country (Interview Kent). Their artistic point of entry into this topic came about when the curators heard about 89 former Danish asylum and emergency aid centers erected during the so-called 'refugee crisis' around 2015 that were set to be dismantled or repurposed, catalyzing their two-year long period of documentation of these sites (Interview Tina & Kent). In line with critical theory, the curators describe their exhibition as an 'alternative archive', one informed by migrants who have been "excluded or [are] in the process of being erased from public memory in Denmark,... [a process] expressed by their absence from the archives as much as in the repurposing and demolition of the buildings across the country" (Fotografisk, 2025). Tina describes her motivation: "It's [a]...question, 'what are you going to use an art space for?...Sometimes it's a space for pleasure. Sometimes it's a space for history and all that, and sometimes I think it is a place for actually addressing important issues. And that is what we are trying to do.'"

4.2 Early Field Navigations

When working as independent curators in this institutionalized field, Tina and Kent are tactical in their navigation of field political dynamics and therefore in their interactions with other actors (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984). Early in the curation process, the curators interacted with other social agents to gain access to the sites of these centers, as some "were totally locked up, some of them had an owner who lived in Dubai, you know, it was like really difficult, really difficult. And some were easy to get inside if they were connected to the municipality" (Interview Kent). Tina and Kent contacted the municipalities and private owners and developers of the 89 centers (Finissage). While Kent states the *kommunes* were very helpful, "always coming and opening it up for [them]," he and Tina faced more difficulty accessing the privately owned buildings. Tina explains how in both encounters she and Kent feigned interest in the architecture of the

buildings, avoiding words like ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’, and states it was not entirely untrue as they were observing and documenting architecture—the “buildings, rooms, surface textures – that shaped the framework of the newcomers’ daily lives in asylum centers” (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984; Finissage; Interview Tina; Fotografisk, 2025). As she states, “You have to be tactical sometimes,” describing her use of what De Certeau & Rendall (1984) describe as the ‘art of the weak’, in which curators were cunning in their interactions with the state or private parties involved in the process of erasing migrant histories in these locations.

Having captured the sites, the curators sought migrants who had passed through the centers willing to share their experiences. Tina describes reaching out to Venligboerne, a politically outspoken organization who “actually greeted [migrants] when they came. [These were] ordinary people with a job who actually went in and did something for” migrants new to Denmark (Interview Tina). Locating a hot spot for migrant arrivals in Southern Zealand, Tina found a list of five names connected to Venligboerne in that region, and identifying a woman with a “foreign middle name” assumedly more sympathetic to the curators’ efforts, she reached out and explains,

The woman said, ‘Oh, you don’t have to introduce [yourself]. You were my teacher once at the Florida school...I would love to help you.’ And she had so many contacts,...a lovely person...who was totally open and [could] see this is a really important project. So it is about making other people see that what you think is important, they see it is important too.

Bourdieu's (1986) lenses of social and cultural capital help us to understand how curators benefitted from their communication skills and tacit curator knowledge of mediating between stakeholders to achieve their project outcomes as weaker actors interacting with stronger social agents (Vigh, 2008; Bourdieu, 1993). Otherwise, Tina and Kent relied on their social networks, including people they were not even aware of, to achieve their desired project outcomes. The silence on their purpose for documenting the centers when interacting with the state shows the adherence to being accountable to the structures they critique yet simultaneously rely on, whereas, with agents they anticipate will empathize with their motivation, curators are more open about the project aims, attesting to their calculated mediation as specialized curators (Acord, 2010). Tina’s social connection with the woman at Venligboerne served as a crucial

contact for the curators to eventually collaborate with 22 refugees or asylum seekers on this project who had passed through these centers (Poster; Interview Tina & Kent).

4.3 Critical Approach and Methods

From 2022 to 2024, Tina and Kent drove “the entire Denmark to collect material” such as photographs, video, and remnants of rubble left from dismantled centers (Interview Nastja). Believing the “archive itself” is a colonial construction, the curators and Nastja call their exhibition an ‘alternative archive’ as its historical contents are determined by migrants who experienced its represented history and structures (Interview Nastja, Interview Kent). Through Stoler’s (2016) understanding, Nastja and the curators reformulate the conventional archive, understood as “colonialism’s durable presence,” to highlight the influence this colonial construction has over hegemonic understandings of national identity, history, and legitimations of knowledge, in which migrants’ own perspectives informing their representations have largely been absent (p. 9; Stoler, 2008). A way they rethink this archive, as Nastja states, is to “leave the archive open to other contributions or possibility of taking things out,” to perhaps account for risk this experiment falls short of its aims; they elaborate it is “powerful through its softness. [It] invites people to shape it” through engagement in meaning-making processes.

In Stoler’s (2016) words, the archive’s “qualified and celebrated memories black out censored ones...[and] have a way of drawing our attention to their own scripted temporal and spatial designations of what is “colonial” and what is no longer, making it difficult to stretch beyond their guarded frames” (p. 5). Unlike Tone’s racial certainties as contemporary colonial assumptions that, contradictory to her aims, left audiences deterred from engagement in further dialogue and meaning making, this archive is left open to transformation if deemed one of the “failed experiments that commonly remain unmarked as ‘proper’ historical events because they were never fully realized and thus were not understood to have been possible or to have ‘happened’” (Stoler, 2016, p. 23). Tina does, however, draw inspiration from Tone’s work stating, “I love [CAMP’s] collaboration with Trampoline Huset, the way that it was situated right inside a place where there was a lot of refugees coming, where there was a lot of mixture.”

Perhaps inspired by Tone's use of contemporary approaches like Enwezor's platforms model, the exhibition 'In the Past We Made History' functions as a platform from which the "the subject for the exhibition [and] the subject for the book, are the one whose voices are heard in the exhibition or the book" (Nielsen & Petersen, 2021; Interview Tina). As independent creatives, Tina and Kent, like Tone, wished to "create something that people will come and see" (Interview Tina). Their strategy regarding location, however, differed from Tone's, as Tina explains,

You have a space in the center of Copenhagen to...reach out to people who maybe come and see the exhibition and think twice and say, okay, maybe they are right about we should maybe look at these people a little differently. Maybe they should become part of the Danish history.

As a means to engage diverse audiences, I posit the curators also drew inspiration from Vanderlinden's 'Laboratorium' to use multiple mediums to inform the exhibition discourse including a variety of installations, workshops, talks, events, and a pending book, discussed later in the chapter.

4.3.1 Collaboration

Through critical theoretical "strategies of remembering and bearing witness,...often left out of...official history writing," the 22 migrants collaborating on this project chose 1,400 photographs from the 6,000 captured by the curators to be included in the archive in order to "renegotiate and retell history" from their historically excluded and occluded perspective (Fotografisk, 2025; Interview Tina & Kent; Stoler, 2016). When interacting with collaborators, Tina explains, "You'd have dinner with them, you visit them, they visit you. I mean, you form a relation." Informed by the principle of generosity from, through Bourdieu's (1977) lens, her habitus, Tina emphasizes the importance of offering food to promote comfortability in the gradual process of building trust. In line with this principle, Kent states:

We are privileged, this is what we can do...It's identifying the time of importance: 2015,...research...how many institutions are left in Denmark and how many have been closed? So with that list...we said, 'there are a lot of people who have lived here, a lot of peoples' memories are in these buildings,...So we went to all these 89 place...[to] do a documentation...And then we will let people with refugee experience choose...images [for the archive], because we are not specialists. We don't know anything about how it is to live there.

Kent frames the use of he and Tina's privilege here as acting on their obligation to work against migrant oppression in this contextualized crisis (Vigh, 2008).

Addressing the power dynamics between he and Tina and their collaborators (Hall, 1997), Kent states, “We are dealing with extremely vulnerable people who are not Danish citizens.” He asks Tina, “Have we met anyone who came in 2015 who has a Danish passport?” she replies “No, no.” Kent continues,

It’s ten years now [since their collaborators arrived in Denmark]...but still you have to go every second year to get [your temporary residence and work permit] prolonged, and they will ask you, ‘Do you really belong here? Don't you belong where you come from?’ ...it's much harsher than people usually think or are aware of...and that's also why...we don't mention [collaborator] last names...If somebody doesn't like this [exhibition], they have to be careful...saying something wrong or standing up being too critical about Danish society...they are constantly vulnerable in Danish society...As an artist [you have] to be extremely careful how you exploit people, and that's also why I know we are both very critical to people who are just using other people without...actually thinking how are we using these people's destiny in the project.

Attesting to the curators’ sensitivity in collaborations, Nastja states, “Tina and Kent were really aware of not putting people in the position to talk about things that are unbearable,” beginning with questions like “What’s your favorite plant?” to build trust and eventually share their memories in the asylum centers. Tina describes their migrant collaborators as ‘witnesses’ stating, “witnesses is the authentic voice,” a sentiment similar to Kent portraying them as specialists and, in the previous chapter, Tone calling migrant knowledge “expert knowledge” (Jakobsen, 2021). In her narrative, Tina also refers to them as “‘former migrants’,...not migrants anymore,” and states, “We call them ‘people with refugee experience’, which I think is a nice way of talking about this person. We even say ‘Danes, slash persons’.” Kent interjects: “Maybe they don’t want to be Danes,” to which Tina replies, “But they can choose.”

Through Bourdieu's (1977) lens, Tina and Kent narrate how their principles of generosity and sensitivity from their habitus guide their interactions with, and representation of, “extremely vulnerable” migrants. However, a tension arises between their framing of migrants as specialists or witnesses and the framing of them as extremely vulnerable, highlighting the curators’ spliced selves (Jakobsen, 2013; Stoler, 2016). Though their critical approach guides their avoidance of particularizing their collaborators to the category of ‘migrants’, their culturally informed predispositions perhaps do not recognize the “vulnerable asylum seeker” stereotype as “imperial

debris” (Stoler, 2016, p. 32; Jacobsen, 2013). However, as it functions to particularize migrants to helplessness, in a context of crisis, migrants internalize this understanding of themselves and routinize their own vulnerability and dependence on members of the dominant group to challenge the oppression they experience (Jacobsen, 2013; Vigh, 2008).

Another tension rising out of their spliced selves is visible when Kent makes the assumption migrants want a Danish passport yet corrects Tina’s similar assumption that their collaborators want to be ‘Danes’, to which he responds they may not. While these curators are influenced by resounding representations in Danish cultural expression that reinforce Western centric codes and a homogenous national identity, their personal and, as critical curators, professional exercise is not giving in to the self-deception that their position relative to those they represent allows; as Stoler (2016) explains, self-deception does not do “justice to the ways we each find to turn away” from oppression and our complicity, whether conscious or not, in it (p. 12-13).

One way they attempt to account for these blind spots is through their close collaboration with Nastja. Nastja states, “I haven’t learned more about the humanity of people meeting [migrant collaborators],” challenging the “discovered humanity of [the migrant] community” rhetoric associated with “hero/victim narratives.” Nastja describes their challenge of the hegemonic notion of particularization as “meeting people as people” and just “speak[ing] about whatever feels natural to speak about.” From the perspective of someone who has experienced to an extent greater than the curators what their migrant collaborators experience, Nastja narrates a desire for people to move beyond particularizing individuals to negatively connoted categories of asylum seeker, refugee, or migrants, and instead direct attention to the structures of violence that create these categories such as the structure of language, and attach them to individuals, a topic returned to in the events section below.

4.3.2 The Exhibition Discourse

The curators, like Tone, use multiple mediums in their exhibition since, as Kent states, “no one of us really believes only in the photograph as a soul-teller of a subject.” The centerpiece of this alternative archive is a textile photo installation featuring the 1,400 photos chosen by migrant collaborators. They capture “buildings, rooms, surface textures...that shape[d] the...daily lives”

of migrants, yet not the migrants themselves, who resided in or passed through them “juxtaposed with photographs from local archives from all over Denmark [to] represent a broader history of migration” (Poster). The photos are sewn onto floor to ceiling cloths with thread meant to symbolize the journeys people made to arrive in Denmark (poster). Through Bourdieu's (1977) lens, Nastja's habitus prompts them to draw attention to the direction of the camera as it is on *structures* like a chair, which invites the audience to consider how comfortable or uncomfortable things are made to be, sending an intentional message of (un)welcome to newcomers to the country (Interview Nastja). They elaborate stating these micro-histories connected to photographed structures show the “intimate boundaries” migrants face in the Danish asylum system, a critical theoretical narration benefitted by by Nastja's education in critical studies, in Bourdieu's understanding, their cultural capital deriving from their habitus (Interview Nastja; Bourdieu, 1977; 1986).

Nastja narrates the absence of people in the photographs functions to detach individuals from the migrant category and its negative connotation in Danish political discourse today (Rodrigues, 2011). Tina and Kent narrate the photographs as migrant memories to signal, “Your memories are important. You have memories from your childhood and...it's not something that we should cross over and say it's gone because it's still there” (Interview Tina). The contradiction between these interpretations highlights the subject-positions between the curators, Nastja, and other migrant collaborators (Hall, 2020). The curators' critical narrative reckons with the colonial construction of the archive, but their explanation of photographed items, what Nastja describes as structures of violence, as constituting migrant memories serves to particularize their collaborators to the migrant category by isolating their memories to these structures. This contrasts with their use of different framings to describe them as people or Danes as opposed to migrants. These tensions enlighten us the the ways the curators are enslaved by the critical curator narrative when its clashes with their culturally informed predispositions shaped by hegemonic cultural perceptions of migrants, thus highlighting their spliced selves (Stoler, 2016).

The second installation, ‘Rohin’ features a video of hands examining a cutting board, a common item given to migrants upon their arrival to asylum centers (Poster). After fleeing Syria for Turkey with her family at age 12, Rohin was sent to Denmark alone and recalls her life in an

asylum center when viewing a photograph of this item (Interview Kent). Tina explains this type of collaboration is “letting people remember and giving their remembering value.” Nastja explains the inclusion of mundane items is a critically informed method to challenge hegemonic notions of what is constituted as ‘historical’.

‘Second Place’ is a video documenting the live dismantling of a former asylum center, ‘The Memory of Salt’ is a “photographic documentation of the interior and exterior of some of the 89...centers that closed in 2018,” and ‘Earth, Soil and Stone’ displays 3D remains of the 89 locations with emphasis on the first center the curators visited, Gloslunde Asylum Center. This center is portrayed as a chalk pile to signify, as Kent explains, that though the buildings are gone, the chalk that remains “fertilizes” the ground and embeds migrant memories into the Danish earth (Finissage). The curators describe the symbolism of this installation is that whatever state these buildings are in, the memories of migrants are still part of Denmark and its national history (Interview Tina and Kent).

4.3.2.1 Events

As Nastja describes, the openness to change is the power of this alternative archive. One way the exhibition discourse was molded, nuanced, or elaborated was at talks and events meant to facilitate audience engagement in meaning-making both with the installations and with other audience members, the curators, presenters, and migrant collaborators, a practice Tone’s explained was as important as what was on display in her CAMP exhibitions (Hall, 1997; Forecast, 2025; Interview Tone). These events included the opening, a reading and panel discussion on “witnesses, museum, and alternative archives,” and the Finissage.

Tina explains the opening crammed a “great mixture of [350] people” into the Fotografisk Center exhibition space made for 140 including “people with refugee experience,...people from the art world, writers, people...interested in these kinds of issues, friends of [the curators], academics, and students” (Interview Tina & Kent; Acord, 2010). Tina says, “We would have food for everyone at the opening..., but we were not allowed because of the health [code].” Instead, Tina explains, the curators “had a big party with 70 people coming [to their] home and mixing...[The migrant collaborators] were very happy to be part of a Danish...I mean, they don't have Danish

friends.” Through Bourdieu’s (1977; 1986) lens, the cultural capital from curators’ habitus guided their conceptualization of the exhibition as a platform for cross-cultural ‘mixture’, further benefitted by their social capital to attract a broad audience. Working from within the Fotografisk Center, curators use tactics to expand on exhibition themes not present in the exhibitions’ installations and handout materials, they used the strategy from their home to further relationship building over food at their home since, as Tina states, their collaborators don’t have Danish friends (De Certeau, & Rendall, 1984). While the critical curator narrative guides the approach to facilitate cross-cultural meetings, Tina’s statement creates subject-positions when, despite calling them Danes herself, she states their migrant collaborators do not have Danish friends (Hall, 2020). This in turn reinforces migrant separation from the Danish majority as influenced by hegemonic notions of Danish homogeneity. Although framed as her generosity of facilitating mixing between migrants and Danes, in a context of crisis, the connoted distinction between Tina’s Danish friends and her migrant collaborators—those she emphasizes calling Danes herself—risks migrant collaborators’ internalization of their differences and dependence on the generosity members of the Danish majority to traverse such barriers, highlighting what Stoler (2016) understands as Tina’s spliced self (Hall, 1997; Vigh, 2008; Jacobsen, 2013).

The second event featured presentations and a panel discussion by Nastija, Rohin, “Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer, senior researcher at the Royal Danish Library, and Louise Wolthers, curator and head of research at the Hasselblad Foundation in Gothenburg” (Fotografisk, 2025). In their narrative, Nastja explains the work of historians like Mette “carries more value than [someone in] the arts.” When presenting the Royal Danish Library’s strategy for archiving migrant history in “a migrant space, a museum up in Farum,...20 kilometers outside Copenhagen,” Tina expressed outrage by this “very conservative” approach, believing it reinforced the exclusion of migrants from legitimized Danish history and that it would not be frequented. Her worry was perhaps not misplaced as the Filipina audience member of CAMP’s ‘Decolonizing Appearance’ stated, “If the intention is to promote support...the location...It’s remote,” continuing that she would “not [recommend] the art space” (Tan, 2019, p. 54).

The curators invited Mette as a representative of the central Danish National Library (Duelund, 2001), whose, in Bourdieu’s understanding, habitus consists of traditional archival practices of

privileged narratives the curators aim to inscribe excluded migrant histories into (Stoler, 2008; Fotografisk, 2025). Understanding her relative authority over archival practices in Denmark, the curators tactically facilitated a panel discussion between Mette and two migrant collaborators using the exhibition as a ‘contact zone’ for dialogue, debate, and perhaps increased understanding of the other (Nielsen & Petersen, 2021). A contentious interaction occurred when Mette asked Rohin if she would prefer to archive the histories of each distinct marginalized group in a different institution (Event 2; Interview Tina & Kent). While her sarcastic delivery and authoritative candor created subject-positions between Rohin and herself, this discussion occurred between adversaries as opposed to enemies with common denominators of opportunity, interaction, and transnationalism within the space of the exhibition (Mouffe, 2014; Karpantschhof & Mikkelsen, 2017).

The Finissage ‘Untold stories given, a collaborative practice of sharing’ began with a presentation of the curators’ motivation, critical curatorial approach, and methods, followed by the showing of a new installation featuring the Syrian poet and artist Abood, whose classical Arabic poetry is translated to English by his son Sal. After the presentation, Abood and Sal (translating for his father) answered questions about Abood’s poetry and the translation process. Their interaction intimately engaged the audience and challenged media portrayals of the Arabic language, as an audience member I talked with said it was the first time he had heard Arabic in a nonviolent context. From Bourdieu’s (1977) conceptual perspective, Nastja’s habitus informs her statement, “The first thing that gets removed is your language when you migrate,” a claim exemplified by misinterpretations during the presentation and Sal admitting he sometimes struggles to understand his father. When asked why he doesn’t write as much poetry in Denmark, Abood analogizes his poems to butterflies describing them as indigenous to Syria that serve as a memory of his home country that he hopes to share with his kids. He explained poetry can be difficult for anyone to understand, but “it is music” and urged the audience to listen despite non-understanding. Informed by what Bourdieu (1977) describes as their habitus, Nastja discusses how the exhibition is a linguistic space where necessary translation sometimes contributes to a loss of artistic meaning. The event thus functions as a “negotiation of linguistic spaces” as a “multicultural and multilingual space” that permits a “migrant song...a migrant rhythm that we can [all] sing” to exist and in which people can “step away from these ideas of

purity or national belonging” associated with language, by which I interpret their own feelings of loss having experienced a similar disconnection to different parts of themselves connected to language.

Bourdieu (1977) might suggest Kent’s education in Psychology guides the curators’ decision not to translate Arabic writing on some of the exhibited photographs since, he describes, one’s native language is their emotional language. Moving to a new place, Kent states, risks disconnecting one from their ability to describe and understand their emotions when they are deterred from speaking their native language if it is connoted with violence, a disconnection Abood explains led to his PTSD diagnosis. At the event, Kent describes the purpose of workshops connected to the exhibition which engaged second generation migrants between ages 12 to 14 in “dialogue with the exhibition,” a space they could “actually talk about their own life and experiences” of the in-between in the exhibition space that accepts and welcomes their emotional dissonances, those shared and not with their parents, and signals their non-Western cultural and linguistic identity can exist in a Danish context (Finnisage Kent). A photojournalist from Iran who attended the Finnisage explained to me, having sought refuge in Denmark 8 years ago, his refugee identity affects him to the extent that it structures how people treat him in Denmark. He expressed a wish for a “tolerance for difference” in the country, what Karpantschhof & Mikkelsen (2017) describe as recognition of the legitimacy of the other’s existence and shared human desire to belong.

4.3.3 Multiple Mediums

As mentioned, the use of multiple mediums is meant to elaborate on the themes captured in the central installation. However, curator narratives, presentations, and discussion at events differ from those communicated by the discursive elements of the installations, handouts and descriptions on Fotografisk center’s website (Poster; Fotografisk, 2025). As Tone described in her project ‘Minority Report’, the exhibition discourse engaged audiences, particularly at events, on themes like racism that had been removed from the title per the festival board’s act of obstruction through political regulation (Stoler, 2016). I posit Tina and Kent’s mention of an open letter to cultural institutions from the Copenhagen municipality offers an explanation for

the contrast between discourse at events, the curator and Nastja's narratives, and that present in the fixed installations and website descriptions:

People are really nervous about talking politics in art halls...that [letter] came from the municipality of Copenhagen out to...to all cultural institutions, all libraries...that they should not address political, foreign political issues. That's an open letter, [stating] 'Do not be too political'...We know, everyone, we are talking about Gaza here...it's okay to address...social issues, but be careful if you get too political, too critical...[our] exhibition was written about in the Swedish newspaper...for Southern Sweden, but not here in Denmark, because people are nervous about how should they address something that [is] political (Interview Tina).

Politiken journalist Torben Benner (2025) explains, "Blaagaard Theatre was not allowed to make the theatre and employees available for a support event for the benefit of a sister theatre in the West Bank" as a result of the government's political regulation signaled by this letter. He notes this restriction has met resistance by "a majority in Copenhagen" who believe "It should...be possible to discuss foreign policy and arrange humanitarian support events in cultural centres, libraries and other institutions" (Benner, 2025). Kent elaborates on the circumstances: "the politicians are...not letting the art centers be a place for free speech because they want to take away this discussion from the public domain...They have taken a lot of the critics down, so there's not so much writing in art." As Nastja states, "all art is political," and the occlusion of some signals which identities are accepted in Denmark. In this sense, Kent notes in Copenhagen "Ukraine has its own cultural house, where they make performances, which is good, but it's socially accepted and Gaza is not," highlighting the difference between cultural representation of Western and non-Western migrants in Denmark (Hall, 1997; Rodrigues, 2011). When describing CAMP's exhibition on discriminate media coverage of conflicts, she states "the genocide in Gaza is a very good example of the neglect, of the inability or the lack of will for the international communities to interfere." The exemplified breach of the culture ministry's arm's length principle in removing critics and these discussion from the public domain, in Stoler's (2016) understanding, "is an act that hides and conceals, creates blockage, and closes off" opportunities to acknowledge, understand, and address these obstructed inequities (p. 11-13; Duelund, 2001).

The curators tactically avoid this regulation by using events, as Kent states: "Things that were spoken in the talks where we didn't have any censoring...there were talks about..." Tina

interjects, “Gaza,” Kent continues, “refugees—Gaza is also very connected to refugees—they...were...clearly stated things during the talks” (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984). Guided by the critical curator narrative, the use of Vanderlinden’s contemporary ‘Laboratorium’ deepened understanding of themes and challenged traditional archival practices, and was also a navigational tactic of the politics of the Danish cultural field to use the platform of the cultural institution to critically engage with its structures, regulatory actors and institutions (De Certeau & Rendall, 1984). Further, the curators plan to write a book as a lasting and unfiltered medium for critical engagement in archival processes and Danish processes of colonial aphasia through political regulation of culture; as Kent says, the “exhibition itself [lasts] for three months and then it goes, but a book in a sense is always there” (Stoler, 2016).

4.4 Funding

When referencing the sponsors of ‘In the Past We Made History’ listed on the Fotografisk (2025) website, Tina explains,

...some of these foundations are supporting Fotografisk center, not supporting the actual work for the exhibition...it's very common that you have commercial foundations..like the [New] Carlbergs Foundation,...Maersk,...Novo Nordisk—all these big companies are often supporting art projects, but they're very often supporting the actual exhibition, the work with the exhibition, the work with the book, but they're not supporting the actual [labor] with the project...And then you have the Danish Arts Foundation, they give working grants...for the actual [labor]. But they're actually not very big, those grants. It's not like you can live a whole year on 50,000 kroner, so there is actually a big problem in how the art money is given out in Denmark...often giving out to the art hall.

As historically prioritized beneficiaries of public funding yet politically regulated by the state through the discussed open letter, the authority of cultural institutions through Bourdieu’s understanding is supported by their symbolic and economic capital that contributes to their cultural capital when it comes to controlling knowledge by way of controlling which cultural representations are exhibited, provided they adhere to logics of their private and public sponsors (1986). As mentioned, emotional/humanistic logics guiding the New Carlbergs Foundations incentivize the Fotografisk Center to show particularizing migrant representations yet reap the benefits of exhibiting popular contemporary critical exhibitions (1986; Lunde Jørgensen, 2016;

Acord, 2010). Furthermore, Tina states the Danish Arts Foundation funded their project even if it “doesn’t support all the work we have done.” Through Bourdieu’s (1977) lens, the habitus of this foundation is portrayed as supporting independent practitioner rights and artistic freedom, but the limited sum guides my understanding of this as an act of obstruction by which the state can operate as an arbiter of taste through political regulatory mechanisms yet occlude this as being contradictory to its arm’s length principle by still providing some support to practitioners that critique state structures and institutions (Duelund, 2001; Lunde Jørgensen, 2016; Stoler, 2016).

Nastja says “arts is a weird creature” in the way that, despite being “lucky to have some funding,...you really have to be passionate and think that this is important to go into such a crazy project.” Tina says, “our friends who are not working in the arts, they don’t understand. They say ‘How much do you get an hour?’ I say ‘We get a lot of hours, not a lot of pay.’ But it’s important to end with ‘We’re privileged enough’ [and] able to say that we will do this work because we think it’s important even if we don’t have full financing,” guided by her generosity principle. Despite this financial precarity as independent curators working within this institutionalized field, Kent explains this is “always how it is. You do a project and hope it works out” (Event 2). One way they have been able to continue their work and more freely voice their critiques is through regional funding from the Nordic Culture Fund through what Tina calls “‘Opstart’ which means ‘beginning of a project’ money. You can apply for [that], but then you have restrictions that...the project has to be in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland or Finland.” *In the Past We Made History*’ has plans to travel to the Arthall Boden in Sweden and in the Skien Arthall in Norway to create and exhibit alternative archives for silenced marginalized histories in these locations (Enghoff, 2025). Similar to Tone’s explanation that one has to continue to generate new projects to acquire enough funding to sustain old ones, Kent states they have applied for more funding from the regional public foundation but, “we don’t know if we actually get the money...But we promised to do [the exhibition workshop] anyway. This is a very normal thing when you work with [the] arts. If you think it’s important, you figure out a way to do it. Sometimes you’re financed, and sometimes you’re not. And usually you are never enough financed.”

4.5 Contemporary Politics of the Danish Art Scene

As it relates to the research question, through the critical curator narratives of Tina and Kent, we access understanding of the politics of the current Danish cultural movement, one in which the state through its open letter deterring cultural institutions from being political signals an increase in state political regulation reminiscent of the first movement. My consideration of this movement as a reconstitution of the symbolic political order, however, is the significantly more powerful role private foundations now occupy over cultural funding in the Danish art scene and thus cultural expressions and the audience understandings they create. My findings are based on the curators' narrated tactics to navigate these politics as they rely on the state regulated cultural institution not only as a proxy to receive funding for the exhibition itself but also as a space in which to showcase their exhibitions in a central location where it is more likely to be visited. When working within the structures of more powerful institutions, curators first navigate their interactions with municipalities and developers by tactically occluding their purposes for documenting the former asylum center sites and relying on their social networks to connect with migrants whose memories from these sites inform the content of their 'alternative archive'. As far as the exhibition itself, their contemporary 'laboratorium' approach is tactical in its utilization of multiple mediums to engage audiences in meaning-making during which they can challenge migrant stereotypes as vulnerable subjects, deviant from and thus a threat to cultural norms, or the racial 'other' in Danish society. In this line, their use of events and workshops as part of the exhibition facilitates cross-cultural dialogue and debate as seen in Rohin's interaction with Mette from the Danish National Library and Abood and Sal's performance and discussion that enlightened viewers to the importance of language preservation and the cultural richness that accompanies diversity. Furthermore, events also allowed for unfiltered discussion of exhibition-related political topics the state may prefer left out of these spaces. Finally, the choice to travel the exhibition, like Tone in her project 'Rethinking Nordic Colonialism', enables curators to circumvent regulation when relying on support from regional public foundations less likely to filter their ideological and institutional critique.

While benefitting from the critical curator narrative in their project, Tina and Kent are caught in tensions when, as privileged members of the dominant societal group, their understandings of migrants and consequently representations of them run counter to curators' stated aims to

challenge migrant particularization. Their collaboration with Nastja and the perspective they (Nastja) add to the exhibition—to direct attention to the structures that attach negative connotations to migrants—runs counter to the migrant particularization found in the curators’ narratives. Further, Nastja’s mention of the ‘alternative archive’ as left open allows it to change if later certain elements are determined as reinforcing as opposed to countering the ongoing operations of contemporary colonialism that particularizes, others, and excludes migrants. A way this has already enabled the archive to move beyond particularizing migrants to their memories in asylum centers is the addition of Abood’s installation in which he shares his poetry of memories before, during, and after his migration journey to Denmark. In relation to the thesis narrative, this movement reveals the exhibition space’s potential as a forum for dialogue on contested issues of migrants, race, and notions of Danish national identity through agonistic interactions and contentious conversations. It suggests that tolerance for difference in Denmark is possible when opportunities to challenge dominant codes for understanding migrants are available to proponents of both sides of these contested issues. Although, the desire by the state to limit political discussions in spaces of culture and art, regardless if all art is political as Nastja suggests, emphasizes the notion of these topics as ever-contested.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has set out to answer the research question of how curators navigate the changing politics of the Danish art scene to represent migrants in their contemporary art exhibitions. This was done with the aim to deepen understanding of the role of the independent curator and how these actors, in the highly institutionalized Danish art scene, have used critical contemporary art to challenge dominant perceptions of a homogenous Danish ‘self’ as distinguished from the racialized ‘other’ non-Western migrants in recent Danish cultural history. More broadly, as my understanding of this phenomena is informed by privileged curator narratives, this thesis hopes to contribute to discussions of how the Danish white majority experiences, accommodates, and perhaps unconsciously resists this social transformation. To do so, I employed a narrative and situational analysis in which, through curator narratives, I accessed understanding of the political ‘situation’ unfolding in the Danish art scene across three distinct cultural movements since postwar welfare state institutionalization of the Danish cultural sector. Contextualizing independent curator narratives among other positions in the Danish art scene enabled me to make sense of the ways its different actors, institutions, and structures influenced the relatively weaker curators in their attempts to represent migrants and, in some cases, experienced contradictions between their narrated aims for migrant representation and the outcomes of their projects when audiences perceived migrants as particularized to dominant stereotypes.

Analysis of the first cultural movement ‘Establishing the Symbolic Political Order’ was done to identify the political dynamics that preempted the emergence of the critical independent curator in the second cultural movement. As demonstrated by the findings, the politics of this period are dominated by the state—represented by the Danish Ministry of Culture. While ministry policies and funding practices attempted to make Danish art and culture more accessible and representative of all members of Danish society, this institution’s promotion of ‘cultural democracy’ did not extend to include racial minorities living in Denmark, a country still in 2001 considered by the state ethnically homogenous. In a country where equality means sameness, the egalitarian perception of the welfare state remained intact despite institutionalized exclusion and silencing of the existence of the racial ‘other’ in the country. In this sense, egalitarian perceptions of the welfare state functioned to invisibilize the state’s use of practical structures to institutionalize discrimination, exclusion, and occlusion of non-Western migrants in cultural

representation which resulted in a reinforcement of dominant societal understandings of Denmark as ethnically homogenous.

During the movements of ‘Danish Cultural Radicalism’ and ‘A Reconstitution of the Symbolic Political Order’, independent curators narrate their use of the exhibition to represent migrants in a way that challenges hegemonic negative migrant stereotypes and reckons with previously identified welfare state institutionalized exclusion and occlusion of this racialized ‘other’. The findings in these movements demonstrate how relatively weaker curators were cunning in their navigation of the changing politics of the Danish art scene and their shift across cultural movements. To navigate political dynamics involving increased state authority over cultural funding and political regulation, in the case of Tina and Kent when needing to access government properties, curators withheld their project motivations as a means to achieve their aims. When it came to the exhibition itself, while Tone diluted her critical approach in the exhibition title, Tina and Kent did so in the regulated elements of the exhibition. However, all curators navigated these politics by using the medium of exhibition events to continue their institutional and ideological critiques in which cases they could openly discuss politically contested issues like race and its operation in relation to migrants in Denmark, understandings of Danish national identity, or, in the more recent exhibition, the conflict in Gaza. Also during periods of higher state political regulation, the tactic to tour their exhibitions internationally enabled all curators to receive regional public funding less likely to be censored. To navigate political dynamics involving decreased state funding and political regulation of cultural expression, Tone benefitted from, contradictory to her aims, “vulnerable asylum seeker” stereotypes when private foundations guided by emotional/humanistic logics funded cultural initiatives to help socially vulnerable groups. As short-term grants from these foundations were not sustainable to fund her long-term projects, Tone also benefited from audience sympathy when this type of imagery guided people to support her projects as volunteers.

As members of the racial majority in Danish, curators have power over those they represent to influence how these racialized subjects are perceived by local Danish audiences. This empowered position serves to blind curators to the ways their work benefits from the reinforcement of dominant migrant stereotypes despite their described efforts and will to

challenge them. These tensions highlight curators' internally conflicting norms and the conscious effort it takes to acknowledge and address the ways they too are influenced by, not only dominant perceptions of migrants in the Danish context, but the way welfare state perceptions of egalitarianism are linked with Western centrism and ethnocentrism that excuses racial discrimination by calling it something else. The obstruction of this structural operation in turn makes it difficult to recognize what racial discrimination looks like and how society may alter practices to challenge its power to divide, 'other', and oppress as the group on the receiving end of these only continues to grow.

Although curators are moved by political dynamics established and influenced by more powerful stakeholders in the Danish art scene, their existence and operations have in some ways catalyzed certain political shifts. For instance, the hiring practices of Danish museums more recently opt for more diversified and specialized curators. As it relates to exhibitions, the increased use of critical contemporary art as a means for social and political intervention enables more historically marginalized voices to inform cultural expressions. For instance Tina and Kent's collaboration with Nastja adds a perspective to their work that, although not the overarching message, invites discussions of the ways state structures like asylum centers or language itself are used to incite nonbelonging in Denmark. Further, leaving the exhibition open makes it malleable to change as different migrant histories are added, as was the case for Sal and Abood whose traditional Arabic poetry highlights the ways cultural expressions have historically connoted non-Western language and culture with violence. Therefore, the use of art and the exhibition space for cross-cultural encounters has the potential both to bring about new understandings of migrants when, in this case, Arabic becomes connoted with the beauty that cultural diversity contributes to society, and to incentivize an increased tolerance for the difference in Denmark. It remains to be seen how, despite significant opposition, rising state regulation of culture will impact the way issues of Danishness and race in Denmark will continue to be contested through art.

6. References

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