

'We are... we are everything': the politics of recognition and misrecognition at immigration museums

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Abstract

Qualitative interviews were undertaken with visitors at five museums that display the histories and experiences of immigration in the United States and Australia. This paper outlines the range of embodied performative practices of meaning making that visitors undertook during their visits and the meanings and political values that they created or reaffirmed in doing so. The key performance at these museums were the affirmation and reinforcement of familial, ethnic and national identities in which individuals explored the tensions between migrant identity and the nationalizing narratives of the resident nation. The performance of reinforcement could also be used to justify both politically progressive and conservative narratives of inclusion and exclusion. Building on performances of reinforcement some visitors also engaged in acts of justification, recognition and misrecognition. In illustrating and mapping out the range of banal and complex ways these museums were used by visitors, the paper argues that museums may be more usefully understood as arenas of justification rather than resources for public education.

Key words: Immigration museums, heritage, recognition, affective practices

Introduction

Responding to public and political debates about immigration, the movement of refugees, multiculturalism and diaspora, there have been calls from within the museum sector to develop politically informed and cosmopolitan displays about the histories of immigration (Gouriévidis 2014), often framed by a desire to influence or educate visitors about the cosmopolitan and multicultural values of diversity (Mason 2013). This paper, drawing on interviews with visitors to immigration museums in Australia and the United States documents the complexity of the 'heritage work' that visitors undertake while visiting. The museums and interviews discussed in this paper are part of a larger ongoing study of a range of different genre of museums and heritage sites. However, immigration museums are discussed here specifically to address the call for museums to intercede in public debates about immigration and diversity by illustrating the range of different ways in which visitors use museums and heritage sites. Both the museums and heritage literature make a range of assumptions about what it is visitors do while visiting and the meanings museums have for them, most specifically that visits are about learning and/or building a sense of collective identity. The research on which this paper is based is driven by, firstly, an interest in checking those assumptions through interviews and an interest in understanding the meaning of visits to visitors; and secondly, by the observation that understanding how people use museums should make for a more effective and informed museological practice.

My overall argument is that museums, in addition to being 'theatres of memory' (Samuel 1994; Smith 2006) and part of national memory complexes (Macdonald 2013), are also arenas of justification. That is, there is a complex interplay between processes of remembering, identity construction and emotional affirmation and investment that works to legitimize and justify particular historical and social narratives, what Doering and Pekarik (1996) refer to as

'entrance narratives', and the political values that underpin these. The social impact of museums may be more usefully characterized by the role they play in affirming and reinforcing identity and belief, rather than as primarily educational resources. There are nuances and degrees of justification that occur, and forms of justification may have either progressive or conservative social consequences. To develop this argument I tease out a range of embodied and affective performative practices of meaning making. These performances centre on issues of affirmation, remembering, recognition and reflection, and the making of intergenerational connections, all of which help define a visitor's sense of place and identity, and the ways in which individuals negotiate the meaning – and seek justification – of their individual or groups' ethnic and/or national identity and their position relative to other groups' identities.

The observation that visitors do memory and identity work as they visit museums may not be overly startling, but it is important to understand what that work *does* in maintaining or challenging wider perceptions of difference and diversity and how visitors emotionally and intellectually invest in the meanings they take away. The paper is structured around identifying and defining the different themes or performances visitors engage in and discussing the implications of these for how we theorize museums and heritage. However, the first sections outline the conceptual framework underlying the paper.

Heritage as performance

Professional discourse framing practice within the museum and heritage sectors defines heritage as material, for instance, as historic buildings and museum collections, and as possessing inherent and immutable national cultural values. Embedded within this professional, or 'authorized heritage discourse', are assumptions that experts must pass on their understanding of the value and meaning of heritage to edify what is often assumed to be a generally uninformed audience (Smith 2006: 29-34). Heritage is habitually assumed to underpin identity, particularly national identity. While some recognition has been given to concepts of intangible heritage that acknowledge non-material expressions, it is the materiality and nationalism of heritage that dominates professional and policy discourses. Non-expert perceptions of the meaning and value of heritage are not readily accommodated by these discourses. The professional and museological definitions of heritage as material artefacts or places misses personal and private understandings of heritage, and also tends to raise the expectation that museums will educate, or at least influence, visitor understandings about the past and its meaning for the present.

Although the agency of visitors to museums and heritage sites has been demonstrated (for example, Bagnall 2003; Dicks 2000; Smith 2006, 2015; Macdonald 2009; Schorch 2015), how this might work to theorize our understanding of visitors beyond ideas of learning and recreating is still to be worked through. An emerging debate, taken up in particular with regards to developing cosmopolitan recognitions of diversity and difference (Mason 2013), advocates that museums should be agents of social change, charged with the responsibility of influencing visitor attitudes (Sandell and Nightingale 2012). The taken for granted definitions of heritage used by museum and heritage professionals, however, helps to obscure the ways in which individuals and communities of interests develop their own understandings of the past and present, often without reference to curatorial or professional aspirations, and the roles such institutions are put to by their visitors. Underpinning the research outlined below is the idea, developed in Smith (2006), that heritage is an embodied cultural performative practice that individuals, communities and societies engage in to negotiate both the meaning of the past, and the way in which that past is used to legitimize or to remake cultural and political values and narratives in, and for, the needs of the present. Traditional definitions of 'heritage' as physical sites or museum collections are rejected, and these 'things' are instead conceived of as part of the suite of cultural tools that are utilized in an active performance of heritage creation and meaning making linked to the legitimation of identity, belonging and sense of place.

The affective/emotional responses of individuals are central to this process, and animate responses to and uses of the cultural tools (items, places or events) that they deem to be 'heritage'. Drawing on Wetherell (2012), Smith and Campbell (2016) argue that a range of affective practices are embodied in the processes of heritage making. Further, affective responses and emotion are always contextual and relational, and will be discursively mediated

(Wetherell 2012: 153). This pragmatic understanding of affect and emotion helps strengthen my previous theorizations of the ways in which visiting particular sites of heritage (which includes museums) may be viewed as embodied and performative processes in which individuals, families and other groups negotiate the meaning of the past for the aspirations of the present, and, in doing so, re/construct their sense of place. In understanding the emotional work that underlies these processes I also draw on the work of Sue Campbell (2003, 2006) and Adam Morton (2013) who argue that emotions can work to give legitimacy to memories. They do this through the perception of what Morton (2002) calls 'emotional truth'. Memories and processes of recollecting that invoke feelings held to be authentic work to validate those memories and the narrative templates (Wertsch 2008) used in that remembering (see also Bagnall 2003).

One of the key assumptions in heritage and museum studies is that heritage is about identity, but it is important to consider the consequences of identity making. To frame discussion of how heritage and identity making have consequences, I draw on the politics of recognition as defined by Nancy Fraser (1995, 2000, see also Thompson 2006). Heritage can be understood as one of a range of specific resources of power that is drawn on to validate or invalidate claims for recognition of diversity or to maintain misrecognition and indifference to diversity and thus help maintain political marginalization and injustice. In this rendering of the politics of recognition, claims to identity are contextualized within historical and contemporary acknowledgements of inequity to make claims for parity in policy negotiations over the distribution of material resources. The assertion of moral worth and self-esteem is also fundamental in this process (Sayer 2005). In applying these concepts to heritage, I suggest that self-recognition by individuals and collectives as either the inheritor of privilege or of marginalization might be understood as a first step in the playing out of either the seeking of recognition for yourself or of the granting of recognition to others. In this context, heritage as an embodied performance of meaning and identity making can be understood as a process that actively works to assert or negotiate the nature of individual and collective identity that interacts with societal acts of offering or withholding of respect and legitimacy. In short, heritage can be understood to have very material overt and covert impact on social debates and justice issues. I will develop these ideas and arguments about memory, emotion and recognition/misrecognition as I tease out the various embodied performances of heritage making that occurred at the immigration museums in this study.

Method and Background to the Museums

Interviews with visitors to a range of genres of museum and heritage sites in the United States and Australia was undertaken during 2010-2013 to explore how visitors engage with and use the heritage displayed by these institutions. In this study, 1141 (US) and 946 (Australia) interviews with visitors were undertaken at 16 heritage sites, museums or individual exhibitions in the United States, and at 11 sites in Australia. Immigration museums were a subset of heritage sites. Table 1 lists only the museums discussed in this paper. Other genres of heritage site or museums that were included in the overall study were sites of national narratives, labour history, Indigenous history, and sites associated with the history or legacies of enslavement.

Immigration Museum Melbourne	133
Ellis Island	100
Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York	80
Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle	14
Japanese American National History Museum, Los Angeles.	38
Total	365

Table 1: Museums and interview numbers

Table One lists the museums and number of visitor interviews conducted. Interviews varied from 10 minutes to an hour long, although they were generally 10-20 minutes in length.

Each interview consisted of a number of demographic questions to determine, among other measures, age, gender, self-identified ethnicity, occupation, educational attainment and distance travelled. For ethnic identity visitors were asked to define this in their own terms, rather than choosing from a list, and a core set of 12 open-ended questions were asked across all sites. Interviewees were convenience sampled and interviews undertaken just before people exited the exhibition. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each interview was read in its entirety and overarching themes that frame visitor engagement, and which are defined below as 'performances', were identified. Each question was also coded and analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to derive descriptive statistics and cross tabulations against demographic variables, Chi square tests were used to determine statistical significance. These were exit interviews designed to identify an immediate response to the exhibition while also asking visitors to reflect on what they were thinking about as they went through the exhibits. Such a methodology cannot of course address how, or if, the exhibition had any meaning beyond the actual visit.

The Immigration Museum Melbourne (IMM) was opened in 1998, and aimed to challenge a conservative turn in Australian politics (Hutchinson and Witcomb 2014, 236). The museum emphasizes the point that all who arrived at and since colonization in 1788 were and are immigrants to Australia; interviews were undertaken in 2010. During the northern summer of 2012, interviews were also conducted at four American museums/heritage sites. The Ellis Island Immigration Museum (EI) documents the history of the island as a processing point for immigrants between 1892 and 1954 (Maddern 2004)¹. Visitors may inspect a memorial listing the names of the people who were processed there and the museum details the stressful inspections those travelling steerage to the US had to undergo. A strong message at the site, echoed in the current web site for the Island entitled 'Island of Hope, Island of Tears', is the idea that the Island afforded immigrants 'the opportunity to attain the American dream'². While Maddern (2004) documents curatorial intentions to exhibit issues of cultural diversity, the Island and its museum has been criticized for nonetheless producing a master narrative of American patriotic sentiment (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 1998, 177f).

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City (TM) is a preserved tenement building in which newly arrived migrants to the US lived; visitors to the site can take guided tours illustrating the working class immigrant history of the building and the surrounding district. The museum has been extensively praised for its inclusive approach and for exploring new ways of thinking about citizenship (Abram 2007; Russell-Ciardi 2008). The Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle, a small regional museum, is dedicated to the history of Scandinavian immigrants to the Pacific north coast. At the time of the interviews, the museum provided a linear descriptive history of immigration copiously illustrated by dioramas and models. The Japanese American National History Museum (JANHM), Los Angeles, documents not only the history of Japanese immigration to the US, but also the ongoing experiences of Japanese Americans. A feature of the permanent exhibitions is the Japanese experiences of internment during World War II.

In 2010, at the time of the interviews in Australia a Federal election would occur less than two months later, and issues of immigration and refugees were a very public issue. Two years later, in 2012, at the time of the interviews in the United States, President Obama had announced that he planned to extend citizenship rights to the children of undocumented immigrants. These issues were at times referenced by visitors.

Of the 365 people interviewed, 41 per cent were male and 59 per cent female. Just over half of those interviewed (57 per cent) were aged 45 and above, while 72 per cent had been educated to university level. In addition, 59 per cent identified as belonging to a dominant ethnic identity (i.e. either Caucasian American or Anglo-Celtic Australian), and 30 per cent were overseas visitors. The majority (74 per cent) were first time visitors to the museum³. In comparison to the overall study, immigration museums tended to have more ethnically diverse audiences, visitors were slightly more likely to be university educated, and they attracted slightly higher numbers of women and overseas tourists⁴. The primary aim of this study is to examine the heritage performances undertaken at immigration museums as such, any differences that occurred between the two countries or between different venues or exhibits is identified in the text below.

Heritage Performances

Visitor interviews from all genres of museum and heritage sites analyzed in the overall study suggest that visitors engage in a range of heritage performances and practices. However, when proffered a list of reasons for visiting, 19 per cent of visitors from the overall study, and 11 per cent of visitors across the five immigration museums, chose 'education' (second on the list) and 13 per cent and 20 per cent respectively chose 'to find out about the history of [topic of museum]⁵. A further 25 per cent and 24 per cent, chose 'recreation' as a reason for their visit. These responses are similar to those recorded by Bounia et al (2012: 16, 77) at European national museums. While visitors largely tended to regard their visits as either educational or recreational, a range of performative practices that developed meanings, ranging from the banal to the complex, were nonetheless identifiable from the interviews. These meanings are not reducible or framed by concepts of 'learning' and a discourse of 'reinforcement' used by visitors was a particular finding at both these museums and museums and heritage sites from the overall study⁶.

While these practices were influenced by an array of variables, including national context, one of the key variables was the genre of site being visited. Immigration museums and heritage sites stood out within the overall study, as they had the highest frequency of tourists (that is, non-domestic visitors) recorded during the research, and aside from sites that addressed the histories and legacies of enslavement, recorded the greatest ethnic diversity of visitors⁷. While the immigration sites' visitors shared a similar range of the performative practices recorded at other site genres, particular performances dominated. The performative practice that dominated across the genres and individual museums and sites involved seeking 'reinforcement and affirmation'. Visitors sought to confirm what they already knew, felt or believed about national, regional or ethnic identity and associated historical narratives, and the collective memories and cultural, social or political values that underpinned these. However, the performance of the passing on of family memories and values affirms Dicks' (2000) observation that heritage is an intergenerational communicative act. A third key performance, most prevalent within the immigration genre sites, occurred around attempts, particularly by grown children, to make connections to familial identity and history (see Kidron 2013 in the context of Holocaust sites). Linked to this performance were personal, and often self-conscious, acts of remembering and emotional reinvestment in particular political and social values. The final performance discussed here, which was also a key performance at sites of enslavement histories and Indigenous sites and museums, was that of 'recognition'. This complex performative practice centred on the recognition of 'self' and/or social or ethnic groups, and was accompanied by an acknowledgement of some level of respect. An associated performance of 'misrecognition' also occurred, where disrespect was maintained and justified. These performances are not necessarily or always discrete, but often overlapped or segued into one another. Learning was something that could occur during visits, but contra to museological expectations, was not something most visitors actually did. Indeed, most visitors at immigration museums tended to identify the educational value of the museum as being significant to children and/or communities or groups *other than* the one to which the visitor belonged. However, a central and underlying aspect of all of these performances for those visitors from immigrant backgrounds was a process of negotiating and asserting their own personal, ethnic and familial identities, alongside a mediation of issues of assimilation into nationalistic historical narratives.

Before outlining the heritage performances that visitors engaged in, it is useful to identify how definitions of heritage and emotional engagement framed these performances. Across all five museums, over a third (37 per cent) of visitors interviewed, when asked to define 'heritage', emphasized family and/or ancestry, while 28 per cent defined it nebulously as their 'cultural background' and part of their identity. Only 4 per cent defined heritage in terms familiar to museum and heritage professionals. In the overall sample, Americans were far more likely to identify heritage as associated with family, ethnic or cultural background across all genres of museum/heritage site, while Australians overall also talked about cultural background, they were also far more likely to identify heritage as material things from the past, or to give vague responses that it was 'history' or 'the past'. The exception to this was at the IMM, where 24 per cent of visitors to that museum identified heritage as family.

What comes across very strongly in the interview data is the depth of emotional responses visitors, in touching on differing registers of engagement (Smith and Campbell 2016), expressed; these responses range from pride, outrage, joyous celebration, distress, nostalgia, anger and ambivalence. The depth and complexity of emotion is expressed by this visitor to the IMM:

I'm very fond of this museum because, I think it's, I'm going to cry, people think of museums as being sort of stuffy, artificial places and this one deals with real people and, I am going to cry [tearful]... It's because it's really powerful because it's the history of real people and the white settlers of Australia, both you know the immigration side which is an enormously powerful story anyway having immigrated from England myself and knowing what it's like to leave your entire family behind and come over. That's the connection I have with that. (IMM106: female, 55-64, retired radio producer, White Australian)

There are three points to draw out here. Firstly, the emotions she is feeling are used to make an empathetic connection, both to her own history and experiences of immigration; her visit is a performance of both making connections and affirmation. She is at one level making connections to her own history, and finding that history and its experiences affirmed, but she is also, at another level, making connections to a wider community of other Australians who have similar experiences. Secondly, how she defined that wider community of immigrants, as white settlers to Australia, is important, as she is clearly linking herself to other British or northern European immigrants. This use of the term, from the context of the rest of her interview, is probably an attempt to differentiate immigrants from Indigenous Australians, however, it also reaffirms a dominant Australian narrative about Australian 'whiteness', a point I return to below. However, the third point, and the one to emphasize here, is the depth of emotion and level of engagement evident – this person is a repeat visitor, and she was crying as she talked to me, and she was certainly not the only visitor I interviewed at immigration museums who did so. She and many other visitors to immigration museums were deeply emotionally and intellectually engaged relative to other genres of sites in the study⁸. A similar sense of engagement was also found across all five museums, as illustrated below:

I was very moved. We went into the Italian American apartment, and I saw a lot of things in there that reminded me of my great-grandfather's home, with the saints on the wall, the cans of tomato sauce, even the photo of Franklin Roosevelt on the wall. My great-grandmother was very much wanting to become Americanised, and she had a photo of Abraham Lincoln on her kitchen wall. So it's very emotional for me, and I certainly appreciate the sacrifice that they made coming here, and to give me the life that I'm able to have today. (TM68: male, 35-44, social worker, Italian-American)

I guess it's emotional. It's, you know that if your grandparents hadn't have come to the United States you wouldn't be here [tearing up]. (EI99: female, 45-54, dental hygienist, American)

As theatres of memory, a sense of physical authenticity at both the Tenement Museum and Ellis Island underlines and helps to give authority to the emotions being experienced. This sense of physicality is evidenced by one visitor at the Tenement Museum's response to the question 'what does being here mean to you':

'[...] in the sense that, you know, grabbing the banister going up the first two flights of stairs – allows me to feel more connected, that's a meaning for me, to my roots.' (TM41: male, 45-54, insurance broker, Jewish American)

This physical authenticity is not the only thing giving authority to the emotions there, but it is important. However, the IMM and the other two museums are not located in buildings where the link to immigration experiences is immediately obvious. That these latter sites still elicit deep emotional responses relates to the idea of emotional authenticity – the emotions generated by all of these museums are very real to the visitors experiencing them, and they are real or

authentic because of the work that those emotions are doing in underpinning and legitimizing the visitors' performances of heritage making. As Wetherell (2012) argues, neither affect or emotion is simply something that people experience without context, it is always interpreted and mediated, and in turn is used to mediate and facilitate cognition. Emotion is particularly important in facilitating the processes of remembering, as the degree to which emotions are deemed to be authentic or 'accurate' are used to validate the memories that have been recalled (Morton 2002; Bagnall 2003; Campbell 2006). The embodied practice of visiting museums and heritage sites can work to reinforce the sense of emotional authenticity, while in turn the emotional validation of memories underlines the significance and power of the past to give meaning to the present (Sutton 2006: 364).

Affirmation and Remembering

One of the most frequent performances was one of reinforcement of existing ideas, feelings and beliefs on a certain topic (withheld 2015). Sometimes, particularly at sites displaying consensus national narratives, this performance of reinforcement would often be undertaken with little critical engagement (although sometimes with deep emotional engagement). Examples of relatively shallow or banal reinforcement, but based on deep emotional engagement and sentiment, at the immigration museums include:

It reinforces, it makes me appreciate and feel proud of my country. (EI181: female, 35-44, nurse, American)

I think people who come over here illegally – I don't know how they get here – they come here illegally and then somehow they're like, taking all of our tax money and all. They need to come here and see what people actually went through to get where they're at today, instead of just coming here and living for free. (EI67: female, 45-54, nurse, Irish-American)

It just reinforced my attitude about narrow nationalism. (IMM012: female, 55-64, nurse, Greek-Australian)

In these examples, what is reinforced may be pride in country, or, conversely, a concern for narrow nationalism, or conservative or progressive views about immigrants and immigration. EI18, references the nationalizing narratives that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 177) identifies as associated with Ellis Island, and all these responses tend to illustrate, as Pekarik and Schreiber (2012) have argued, that visitors tend to leave exhibitions and museums with their entrance narratives intact. In contrast to these examples of national narratives, some performances of reinforcement focus on seeking and finding affirmation of personal or familial experiences, for instance:

I was very young [when we immigrated] and don't have a lot of it available to me through family or anything like that so seeing it in here just reinforces what I've been told [by my family]. (IMM047: female, 55-64, social worker, British-Australian)

Um, definitely. The whole American journey I feel I'm connected to, you know. As I told you before, I'm Jamaican – coming here, it was struggles, difficulty, and just like the journeys others have made before, that if you really put a lot or put 100 per cent into what you're doing and be consistent, be diligent with it, that you can succeed. So a part of my history, you know, is really embedded in the message that was here today. (EI7: female, 45-54, nurse, African-American/Jamaican)

What is affirmed in these examples was family history and personal experiences of immigration. EI7, a relatively recent immigrant to the United States, was seeking not only affirmation and historical context for her own experiences, but also performing acknowledgement of her adherence to certain American national and social values that she considered were embodied by the place, in this case Ellis Island, that she was visiting. She is affirming her commitment to diligence and hard work. Ellis Island in particular was identified as a place not only to affirm

your own or familial experiences of immigration, but was frequently used to embody integration to perceived American social values. A particular narrative template (Wertsch 2008) appears to have been used to frame the way in which immigration to either the United States or Australia was remembered. The narrative rehearsed by many United States visitors, either migrants themselves or individuals with longer familial roots, focused on a strong sense of historical gratitude towards immigrants who were perceived as having had the courage to migrate to America, and then to have worked hard to help build American society and identity. For some, this narrative was seen as a commemoration of cultural assimilation, often talked about in terms of the cliché 'melting pot', while for others it was a commemoration of diversity. Intertwined in this narrative, particularly at Ellis Island, was also a sense of gratitude for an ill-defined sense of 'freedom', which was not always explicitly linked to the immigration experience, but nonetheless appeared as an 'under-labourer' in many American visitors' discussions of immigration history. Thus, while EI7 is affirming her experiences as an immigrant, she is also performing an embodied demonstration to herself through her visit of her integration of American nationalizing narratives. In Australia, the narrative template that appears to frame many of the visits to the IMM is a celebration of multiculturalism, although what multiculturalism meant varied considerably between visitors, some of whom defined it through assimilatory terms, while others stressed difference and diversity.

Sometimes the sense of self and place that was being affirmed was done privately, and sometimes the performance of affirmation was more public. In the following, the visitor, was visiting the IMM by himself as the rest of his family was shopping, however, he was very actively going to use his visit to affirm to his daughter and granddaughter that his history mattered:

Well I want to prove to my grandchildren and my children and this is the beginning, they can see those photos and I was one of them, I'm not in there [actually in the photos] but I was 21 years old, blah blah blah and that's where we started our future. (IMM099: male, over 65, pensioner, Italian-Australian)

Although he notes that he personally is not in the exhibition, it nonetheless provides affirmation of his own history, which he felt was often dismissed, particularly by his daughter and granddaughter, as granddad going on and on 'blah blah blah'. As he goes on to exclaim:

I'm going to find those women and before we go home tonight I'll say 'I've been there' now remember, my girls [...]. That's it!

In another example from the IMM, a woman is visiting with her grown daughter, and the mother proceeds to explain to her daughter how and why she feels sentimental nostalgia about her voyage to Australia by ship, concerned that her daughter does not understand the significance of her personal experiences and how they fit into recent Australian history. They negotiate the legitimacy of this emotion, and in doing so work through a strong recognition of the validity of familial history and its place in Australian economic development. At the end, the daughter acknowledges the contribution of immigrants to Australian society is 'greater . . . than you [that is, she] would have anticipated', the mother, in response to this recognition, expresses pride, and exclaims:

We are . . . we are everything.

(IMM030: female, over 65, retired own business, English-Australian)

Visitors were often seeking affirmation of personal and political viewpoints and beliefs. The performance of visiting becomes an embodied commitment, reminder and legitimization of the political positions held by the visitor. Interestingly, re-commitments to either conservative or progressive political views could occur at the same sites. Indeed, quite conservative views could be reinforced by visitors without the visitor being either aware or concerned by apparently contradictory interpretive material provided by the museum. Examples of reinforcement and affirmations of conservative positions tended to focus on the values of assimilation, or ideas that immigrants today are not as hard working or committed as those in the past:

The importance of assimilation. There are still many groups that are not assimilated.

(TM63: male, over 65, information technology, Irish-American)

[...] my grandmother came when she was 16, alone, not with anybody else, and she was a cleaning lady in Tacoma, and [there were] thousands of people that were willing to do something like that to make a better life for themselves. Where today nobody would even think of doing something like that. (NHM7: male, 55-64, pastor, Scandinavian-American)

Progressive views were also reinforced at the same museums, these tended to focus on understanding the ongoing tensions immigrants faced:

Immigration issues are becoming more difficult in Germany, especially after September 2001. I'm from a Muslim context [immigrated to Germany in the 1970s] and it never meant much to me, but now people ask me if I am Muslim all the time. I used to not identify as such, but now I do. People worry about immigration too much now, it has become a real problem, and I wonder as a journalist how much I may contribute to this unfortunate worry about it. These are issues I was thinking about during the tour. In the 1970's no one worried about immigrants, it was easier then, now it is harder. (TM22: female, 45-54, journalist, Pakistani-German)

Seeking reinforcement and affirmation could be a performance in and of itself, however, visitors could use this to then do other things, or engage in other performances, or indeed affirmation could also arise out of other forms of engagement. A significant performance that either led from or worked to support a sense of affirmation was the performance of making intergenerational connections, a heritage performance that has previously been documented by Dicks (2000) and Kidron (2013) in different contexts.

Intergenerational connections

The sense of connection that some visitors sought or achieved was undertaken in two ways. Firstly, by visitors accompanied by young or grown children who were attempting to pass on familial memories and values, and secondly by grown children attempting to make connections with absent parents or grandparents and to remember familial collective memories. Examples of this sort of connection include:

My mother grew up in New York, so she used to talk [...] and my grandmother, talked all about living in New York and all the various areas. It just gets me in touch with feelings of where I came from and who I am today. (TM30: female, 55-64, teacher, Jewish-American)

It's a good reminder for me to just think about what my parents and grandparents had to go through, and it's a good reminder. It's something that you don't want to forget. (JANHM7: female, 25-34, office manager, Japanese-American)

This performance of connection was frequently undertaken by grown children not only remembering familial stories, but seeking to explore a sense of familial identity. However, this form of connection could also be made by older generations exploring connections with children. For example, a woman who identified as Jewish American from New York visited the JANHM to reflect, on the occasion of the birth of twin grandchildren to her son and Japanese-American wife, what it might mean for the twins to have family members on both sides of the family who had experienced concentration camps (JANHM17). Other complex connections between family, citizenship, class and ethnicity were also explored by some visitors:

I don't know. I think yeah, it touches a lot of different parts of my identity. My grandmother and her family were in [internment] camps, but also, you know, this is - just as an American citizen? Like, this is my history as well, and I think that this is a really important, you know, part of our political identity as well as [my] ethnic identity too. (JANHM2: male, 25-34, writer, white-Asian-American)

It makes you sort of reflect on your reasons for coming [to Australia] [...] I have a son born here so it helps him to, in some ways his connections with where we've

come from, but he's Australian [too] so all those things went through my head.
(IMM105: female, 45-54, library assistant, Irish)

Senses of familial heritage were also used to explore wider issues of citizenship and community identity. The collective sense of participating in shared activities of leisure not only defines a community of belonging, but also facilitates the negotiation of individual and familial senses of place in the resident society (Mata-Codesal, Peperkamp and Tiesler 2015). These performances of connection, reinforcement or affirmation could also facilitate further performances of recognition, but also misrecognition.

Recognition and reflection

Recognition is based not only on an acknowledgement of difference, but specifically upon a cosmopolitan validation that difference is legitimate (Fraser 2000). While the offering of respect meets a basic emotional need (Honneth 2005), the definition used here identifies a pragmatic project that requires the undermining of domination or wrongful deprivation (Young 2000: 83). Making appeals to the past to legitimize calls for restorative justice helps authorize claims of difference, particularly where this has been met with prejudice and marginalized access to resources (Fraser 2000). As Forst (2012) argues, the right to justification is essential so that claims to recognition can be turned into political action. Recognition, however, is not the same as identity politics, which may be defined simply as attempts to cultivate a sense of shared identification (Young 2000: 107). The connections identified by many visitors to the immigration museums in this study can be identified as identity politics, in so far as people are seeking to make connections with others, either in their family or society, with similar individual or familial experiences of immigration, and who may share similar narrative templates and values about immigration. Recognition, as opposed to a sense of affirmation or the sense of connection discussed so far, requires a highly engaged emotional register that actively recognizes and validates difference and its legacies. For some visitors, simply visiting the museum was understood or expressed as an embodied act of recognition. For instance, one Caucasian American visitor to the JANHM had said that she was motivated to come to the museum because she felt terrible about the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII; when I asked why she felt it important to come to the museum, she responded:

Well, for my own experience and because I just think we owe it to these people to be very aware of what happened. (JANHM3: female, over 65, retired educator, Caucasian-American)

The act of coming to the museum, in this case, was itself a performance of recognition of another group and their experiences of injustice. Visitors who themselves did not belong to the community group represented by a particular museum or heritage site did, on occasion, define their visit as an act of acknowledgement of injustice. On occasion, recognition occurred spontaneously when a visitor's point of view had been altered by the exhibition, although this was rare. More often recognition, when it was done, tended to be intended and built on performances of affirmation and connection.

An issue often neglected in the literature on the politics of recognition is that for recognition of difference to occur, those doing the recognizing need at the outset to be aware of themselves as the inheritors of privilege or marginalization. Thus, performances of affirmation and connection are necessary steps in the process of recognition. This does not mean to say that such performances always lead to recognition – indeed they can equally lead to misrecognition – but only that they do need to occur if recognition is to be achieved. Affirmation of one's own identity also needs to be interlinked to an affirmation of the understanding and emotional response a visitor has to issues of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and/or immigration. In addition, deep empathy, that is a sense of empathy that moves beyond the 'I feel sad' for a particular group or individuals to compassion, is required. While some commentators have argued that empathy can be little more than a demonstrative and fleeting awareness of another's lack of equity (Pedwell 2013), empathy linked to imaginative responses that deepen a sense of connection to heritage, and facilitate recognition of the ways in which injustice has been inherited from the past, is vital (Keightley and Pickering 2012: 106). The ability to recognize and mediate

an emotional response to an issue is also important for empathy to lead to recognition, but also to action. That is, a visitor needs to either possess, or to engage, their skills of emotional intelligence (Mayer et al. 2008) to recognize an emotional response, and to use that emotion to reflect on or otherwise engage with the exhibition.

Across all five museums, in response to the question 'are there any messages about the heritage or history of America/Australia that you take away from this museum/place', 10 per cent of respondents offered messages of recognition (see Table 2). This response occurred most frequently at the IMM, and did not occur at either Ellis Island or the Nordic Heritage Museum. What was often being recognized was the importance of the idea of multiculturalism. However, at Ellis Island, the patriotic sentiment identified by Kirshenblatt-Gimblet (1998: 177) tends to foreclose the possibility of recognition of difference. Certainly, the narrative templates of historical gratitude and that of the 'melting pot' were linked at Ellis Island to expressions of nationalism – 'Just that this truly is a melting pot for all nations' (EI54) as one visitor to the Island defined it – inhibited the possibility of cosmopolitan reflection. However, examples of recognition from other immigration museums in this study include:

Probably that the stuff that's sticking in my head more is the idea of that melting pot, and how well-meaning people tried to melt different cultures together, but I prefer the fruit salad, where we kind of mix together, but you never melt it. (TM64: female, 55-64, school counsellor, Black American)

I think that we, the United States, we come from a really rich culture and that that's good, and that diversity is really important, and that we learn about that and accept people's differences and their lifestyles and, you know, their backgrounds and things. And we can learn from that. (TM43: female, 55-64, teacher, Lebanese-American)

In addition to those who offered recognition, some took away political messages, expressed historical gratitude (often for decisions family members made to migrate) or reflected on current issues (Table 2). These messages and reflections sometimes drew on aspects of the exhibition, but often they affirmed a position already held, or provided more information to support that position. The 23 per cent who said they took no message away tended to explain that they simply saw no message, while a further 3 per cent explicitly stated that the museum had reinforced what they already knew (Table 2). In terms of changing their views following their visit, 71 per cent said they had not. While this frequency is relatively low compared to those who answered this question at other types of museums in the wider study,⁹ it is clear that many people arrived at the museum with strong views about immigration and left with those views reinforced. Not all views, however, were cosmopolitan in nature. Negative views about immigration and its consequences for Australian and American society were as equally reinforced and affirmed as those with views that were cosmopolitan. Where this occurred, a not infrequent consequence was misrecognition.

Misrecognition

Unlike recognition, misrecognition could occur in either active or passive forms. In the active form, visitors felt strong feelings of reinforcement of entrance narratives and their identities. It is important to stress that conservative views could be reinforced despite curatorial attempts at either neutrality or the provision of progressive messages. Fear and uncertainty are closely linked to the core convictions of conservatives to resist change, and seek reinforcement of their views (Jost 2006). In the following example a visitor to the IMM, which holds a self-consciously progressive position (Hutchinson and Witcomb 2014), takes away a conservative message that confirms her fear that the children of migrants do not do enough to assimilate into Australian society:

[...] I don't think there's a genuine, I don't think it's the migrants who've come I think there's a problem with their children. I think that's where all the problems, mainly with the Muslim people, where we had a mainly Christian society, it's not so much that the Muslims who've come here for a better life it's their subsequent

children who are causing the problems. (IMM007: female, 55-64, public servant, Australian)

Later in the interview, she goes on to note:

When it was a good old White Australia Policy¹⁰, we didn't have the problems that we've got now and you know, and in our time of life this is a big change that Australia is suddenly in, in [a] turmoil that we've never had to address [before].

She is investing in the border security narrative identified by Papastergiadis (2012), which deliberately conflates immigration with concerns over terrorism, showing that people will find affirmation and reinforcement of the narratives they bring with them to a museum.

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	No message	81	23.2
	Platitude	24	6.9
	gratitude, historical debt	40	11.5
	Recognition: gaining or showing respect	33	9.5
	A critical engagement with reflection on modern issues	33	9.5
	nationalistic/patriotism/national identity	18	5.2
	making empathetic link	20	5.7
	vague or simple statements about how hard it was/is (no empathy, gratitude etc, just repetition of how hard it was)	13	3.7
	Engaged politically progressive message	24	6.9
	Engaged politically conservative message	4	1.2
	Yes, but unelaborated	7	2.0
	How society has changed for good	10	2.9
	reinforcing feelings and/or knowledge	10	2.9
	preservation message (important to preserve past)	9	2.6
	Being here confirms aspects of personal identity	8	2.3
	Making a vague connection to the past	5	1.4
	educational for younger generations or other groups	4	1.1
	values of people in past to be taken up or reinforced in present	3	.9
	critical of exhibition	2	.6
	Total	348	100.0
Missing	99	17	
Total		365	

Table 2: Are there any messages about the heritage or history of America/Australia that you take away from this place?

Misrecognition also occurred when entrance narratives and visitor identities were not reinforced, and cognitive dissonance occurred. When this happened two strategies, one passive and one active, were deployed by visitors to close down both emotional and intellectual engagement. The passive response was expressed by the use of platitudes, that is, thought terminating clichés, such as 'the past is different to the present, we need to move forward'. As Table 2 illustrates, platitudes (7 per cent) were offered only slightly less frequently as active acts of recognition (10 per cent). On occasion platitudes could be used when words failed a speaker, however, the context of the responses summarized in Table 2 suggest that the platitudes were offered as a way of closing down engagement and cognition. The other response to a lack of

affirmation of a visitor's sense of self was the active deployment of self-sufficient arguments. Self-sufficient arguments are 'common-sense' statements that tolerate no argument, for instance, 'you cannot turn back the hands of time'. These and similar statements have been identified as modern or covert forms of racism (see Wetherell and Potter 1992; Augoustinos and Every 2007) and can be used as short hand for the 'I am not a racist but...' sentiments that work to reassure the speaker that they are not being racist but are simply stating 'a fact'. Self-sufficient arguments used at both Australian and United States immigration museums were the idea that immigrants were 'taking jobs', that they took resources (in Australia this focused on water and in the United States on welfare payments), and in Australia a further issue was that 'nobody liked a queue jumper'¹¹. Examples of self-sufficient arguments were invoked in response to a number of questions in the interview, instances include:

Well it's one of those things, physically [Australia is] a tremendously large place but actually its resources can only cater for, it's the water and things like that, I mean the biggest majority [of Australia] is just desert when you think about it, and that's the only thing, I mean you can't, you just can't have unlimited migration [...] and that's not being racist it's just stating a simple fact you know, that um... (IMM035: male, over 65, retired welder, English-Australian)

Well I don't think the people who are coming in, the queue jumpers shouldn't be allowed in because I think the people who are waiting nicely in refugee camps like the majority of the ones that are [shown] upstairs [in the exhibitions] there did and they should do the same. (IMM049: male, over 65, retired government worker, Australian)

Platitudes and self-sufficient arguments are two measures of disengagement, their use allowing the visitor to maintain misrecognition and indifference and thus to justify inequality. The divisions between recognition and misrecognition are not always clear-cut. To explain this, I need to return to IMM106, the repeat visitor to the IMM who linked her own experiences as an immigrant to other white settlers. While I believe that IMM106 was making a stumbling attempt to acknowledge a difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians when she identified herself as a white settler, there is nonetheless an important issue here. IMM106 goes on later in the interview to offer a strong expression of recognition and respect for Muslim communities in Australia, and I do not want to take anything away from the sense of recognition being performed by her. However, the self-identified ancestry of the majority of visitors to immigration museums in my sample is well-educated visitors who identified with dominant ethnic identities in both countries (Caucasian Americans and Anglo-Celts in Australia). The overall profile of visitors shows that they were Caucasian/Anglo-Celts with high educational attainment, and this is a characteristic profile of visitors to most museums and heritage sites in Western countries (Bennett et al. 2010: 180; Bounia et al 2012: 16, 52-75¹²). There is a particular sub-theme of celebration of people of European descent making connections with their own or familial experiences at the IMM, Ellis Island, the Nordic Museum and the Tenement Museum. This does not mean to say that Australians and Americans of non-European backgrounds were not themselves making and performing connections, nor does it mean that Australians and Americans from non-European backgrounds are not being recognized by self-identified Americans or Australians of northern European ancestry. However, the dominance of Caucasian and Anglo-Celtic visitors draws attention to the collective and very public performance at each of the museums. For some visitors this *collective* performance speaks to a sense of cosmopolitanism, in which white-English speaking Australians and Americans place themselves in a multicultural context. However, as Hage (2000) argues in the case of Australia, ideas of multiculturalism can work to reinforce existing narratives of white Australia. A question, which needs further consideration, is what political and cultural work does the collective performance of visiting individual immigration visits do, and is the collective performance offering sufficient recognition to subvert established narratives. If the core performance of museum visiting is essentially one of reinforcement and affirmation of self, then the collective performance dominated by Caucasians and Anglo-Celts becomes an affirmation of both the narrative templates used to facilitate the memory work done at the sites and the experiences of dominant ethnic groups.

Museums as an educational resource.

While over a third of visitors initially selected educational variables from the list of 'reasons for visiting', most visitors, when they talked about the educational roles of the museum, tended to identify it as a resource for children or people from ethnic groups *different* to the one with which they identified. It is possible that visitors nominated 'education' because there is a strong public perception that that is what museums are for, and being educated is what you should be doing at them (Cameron 2006; Bounia et al 2012: 18). Although no specific question was asked about 'learning' as such, deeper questioning, however, about what the visit meant to visitors revealed that issues of education and learning do not feature, nor does the museological discourse of 'learning' really encapsulate the nuances of what visitors are doing (see Smith 2015). Rather, visitors appear to be using museums as theatres of memory, reflection and justification:

[...] museums like this sort of gives you an hour to stop and actually, perhaps really engage in some of the ideas and some of the issues that are there and actually, are so relevant to what's going on at the moment with the debate about immigration which is very, very important [...]. (IMM109: male, 45-54, student, New Zealander)

A sub-set of visitors used the museum to reflect on current issues not necessarily raised in the exhibitions. Visitors to the IMM in particular reflected on the debate about refugees that was (and remains) current in Australian public life. In the United States the 2012 debate over extending citizenship rights to the children of illegal immigrants was something visitors to Ellis Island and the Tenement Museum reflected on during their visits, as this was an active public debate at the time of the interviews. The 29 per cent of visitors who felt their views had been changed could be said to have learned something. Most felt they were now better informed or had gained new information, augmenting or slightly altering their view points, while 4 per cent considered the museum had made them think about immigration history and/or contemporary issues in new ways. In these cases, and as documented by other studies (Schorch 2015; Smith 2016), changes of view only occurred when empathy and imagination were engaged. The point to emphasize here is that while some visitors were learning, using 'learning' as the primary framework to understand what visitors do, can itself misrecognize not only the range of meanings that visitors create, recreate and justify for themselves, but more importantly the social and political consequences of those meanings.

Conclusion

The performance of reinforcement and affirmation is a foundational performance most visitors engaged in, which affirmed senses of self and the historical and social place of the performer. This performance often underpinned emotional and intellectual commitment to certain progressive or conservative narratives. It also appears to contradict the view that the primary role of museums is to promote 'learning', as they appear to be used as not simply theatres of memory, but as arenas of justification. Through practices of affirmation, making intergenerational and familial connections and recognition/misrecognition museums become arenas where individually and collectively justification is negotiated – however, this process can of course lead to the justification of both injustice and justice. The dominance of ideas of education/learning that frame museological and professional heritage practices need reassessment. The degree to which museums and heritage sites are used for memory work, self-recognition or self-affirmation, alongside wider recognition of diversity, suggests these sites can play a powerful role in providing spaces for individuals and groups to affirm and explore their own identities. This can affirm self-confidence and self-esteem in migrants and their families, while simultaneously maintaining received nationalizing and exclusive narratives for visitors who identify as migrants and those who do not. Museums are cultural tools that are used in the processes of making historical and social meanings. At one level this meaning may be created by curatorial and interpretive staff, however, at another level, meaning is also made by individual and collective visits that may – or may not – overlap with that developed by professional staff. However, the performances of meaning making *within*,

and not just by, the authorizing institution of the 'museum' have emotionally powerful and compelling consequences for wider societal performances of recognition and misrecognition. The responsibility of curatorial staff in influencing social debate has been widely debated, however that debate has yet to take into consideration the agency of the visitor. Immigration museums, as sites that address issues of diversity, assimilation and the historical legacies of exclusion and inclusion, are used to justify and affirm complex networks of individual and collective performances of both cosmopolitanism and assimilation. Identifying museums as arenas of justification requires a reconsideration of the centrality of curatorial and professional roles in the representational function of museums.

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Notes

- 1 See also: NPS (National Park Service) March 1, (2015) Ellis Island: Island of Hope, Island of Tears. <http://www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm>. Accessed March 2, 2015.
- 2 Ibid
- 3 In the overall study the frequencies were: 54per cent were female, 58per cent were over 45, 71per cent came from dominant ethnic backgrounds, 57per cent held a university degree and 18per cent were overseas tourists.
- 4 Ellis Island, the Tenement Museum and the IMM had roughly equal proportions of overseas visitors, suggesting that Ellis Island, a significant New York tourist destination, was not influencing this result.
- 5 Prior to the open ended questions, visitors were asked to choose a reason for visiting the museum, the choices varied slightly for each museum, but the standard options were: 'recreation', 'education', 'taking the children' (always first, second third on the list) and were followed by other standard choices such as 'did not come specifically to see the exhibition/ passing through', 'to find out about [topic of museum]', 'to think about/explore [topic of the museum]', followed ,where relevant, by museum specific choices, and finally, 'other'.
- 6 The term 'reinforcement' and its synonymous were not used in the interview schedule, but reinforcement, affirmation and etc. were frequently used by visitors to frame how they defined what the visit meant to them, the messages they took away, how the exhibitions made them feel and so on (see Smith 2015, and forthcoming).
- 7 While migrant status was not explicitly recorded, interviewees were simply asked to define their own ethnic identity, which have been grouped here as Caucasian/Anglo vs non-Caucasian/Anglo. Visitors to all immigration museums, except JANHM, were predominantly Caucasian/Anglo.
- 8 The term 'register of engagement' was used as a relative measure across the different sites and genre of sites, other sites with similar deep engagement were Labour History sites and the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis.
- 9 In the wider study 80per cent of visitors said their views had either not changed or had been reinforced.
- 10 The 'White Australia policy' was the immigration policy that existed in various forms from Federation (1901) to 1973 and restricted immigration to Australia to Europeans.
- 11 So-called 'queue jumping' references public debates about the arrival of refugees by boat to the Australian coast, these people were often characterised as 'jumping the queue' for the processing of their refugee status.

- ¹² Museums that focus directly on issues of labour or address specific ethnic communities tend to have high proportions of, or be dominated by, non-traditional museum visitors.

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