

<b>Institution: De Montfort University</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</b>
<b>Title of case study: PhotoCLEC: developing skills in the heritage sector</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The impacts described in this case study relate to the HERA-funded project “Photographs, Colonial Legacy and Museums in Contemporary European Culture” (PhotoCLEC). The PhotoCLEC research plan and its outcomes necessitated engaging with users (in the form of museum professionals) and the project’s major outcome is an open-access educational website for the museum and heritage sector. However, the most significant impacts result from work with museums on developing skills around ‘difficult histories’ and the role of photographs in the museum space, driving cultural change within the sector and leading a number of museums and museum professionals to re-think the role that their photographic collections can play within their exhibitions.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Funded by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) and EU FP7, PhotoCLEC was an international collaborative research project, led by DMU and undertaken in partnership with University of Bergen and VU University Amsterdam. The team comprised Professor Elizabeth Edwards (Project Leader, DMU, Director of the PHRC since June 2011) and Dr Matt Mead (DMU), Professor Sigrid Lien and Dr Hilde Neilssen (Bergen) and Professor Susan Legêne and Dr Pamela Pattynama (Amsterdam). The project also included museum professionals working with the project team, specifically Jaina Mistry from Leicester Museums in the UK and Daan van Dartel and Eddy Serise in the Netherlands. The project started initially (mid 2010) at University of the Arts London, and moved to DMU with Professor Edwards where its research, dissemination and impacts were fully developed and brought to fruition. PhotoCLEC drew especially upon the unique research environment provided by PHRC with its core research interests in museology and historiography, and scholarship in photography over a number of different but interrelated fields including geography, anthropology, material culture studies, postcolonial studies and cultural studies.</p> <p>The project was realised through three linked and collaborative investigations which emerged from and which were responsive to the specific conditions of colonial legacy in three European countries. These projects – ‘Photographic Heritage, “Difficult Histories”, and Cultural Futures’ in the UK, ‘Indies Images of the Colonial Everyday in a Multi-ethnic Postcolonial Society’ in The Netherlands, and ‘Foreign and Home Images of Unacknowledged Colonial Legacies’ in Norway – formed the basis for a comparative understanding of the cultural processes at work in formulating museum practices around photographs and the colonial past.</p> <p>The research examined practices and collections across a wide range of institutions in the UK, the Netherlands and Norway. In the UK, site visits, interviews and archival work were undertaken in numerous museums, notably in case study museums in Oxford, Leicester, Bristol (British Empire and Commonwealth Museum). The project also visited a large number of museums in Birmingham, London, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Bristol, Cambridge and elsewhere, analysing displays in terms of the visibility of colonial narratives – both visual and textual. Planning meetings were attended, curators interviewed, focus groups undertaken and the researchers worked with curators to address specific problems that arose during the period of the research, particularly in relation to patterns of visibility of the colonial past in museums, and around the lack of skills in interpreting photographs, especially in the contexts of difficult and contested histories. This fieldwork informed the broader research findings about the ‘disavowal’ of the colonial past in public narratives of history and its ‘unspeakability’ in the context of multicultural sensitivities.</p> <p>The results of this research were synthesised into the project website, which is intended for curators, heritage managers, teachers and students. The website responds directly to the concerns of curators, and addresses debates about difficult histories in museums, the role of photographs in the museum space and the role of museums in the representation of the colonial past.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elizabeth Edwards: PhotoCLEC:Photographs, Colonial Legacy and Museums in Contemporary Europe. (HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area)/ESF award, 2010-12 €463,250) <a href="http://www.heranet.info/photoclec/index">http://www.heranet.info/photoclec/index</a></li> </ul>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

- *Photography and Culture* 5(3) November 2012. Special issue 'Photographic Legacies: Addressing the Colonial Past in Europe' edited by Elizabeth Edwards, Susen Legêne and Sigrid Lien. (ISSN 1751-4517)
- Photographs, Colonial Legacy and Museums in Contemporary European Culture <http://photoclec.dmu.ac.uk>
- E. Edwards and M. Mead, Absent Histories and Absent Images: Photographs, Museums and the Colonial Past, *Museum & Society*, March 2013. 11(1) 19-38 <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/documents/volumes/edwardsmead.pdf>

**4. Details of the impact**

As a direct consequence of the broader aims of the PhotoCLEC project, many museums have begun to fundamentally re-think the role of their photographic collections. This case study focuses on these impacts within the UK; however, similar examples could be cited and demonstrated from the 30+ museums involved in the project in three countries (<http://photoclec.dmu.ac.uk/node/27>).

PhotocCLEC established the PHRC as a major authority on photographic collections and this impact was demonstrated in 2012 when the British Museum entered into a formal collaboration with Edwards (through an AHRC-funded CDA award) to begin to understand the full potential of their extensive photographic collection.

Deliberately, and from the initial design of the project, PhotoCLEC's focus, format and structure was closely allied with the needs and interests of museums and museum professionals. The project's open access website was specifically developed as a dissemination and knowledge exchange tool and thus presents the project's research in a way that directly addresses the concerns of the museum and heritage sector. The various discussions on the website are those that emerged from work with museums and curators. The content was scoped through feedback from curators and museum studies/heritage students and was designed to make a clear, demonstrable and ongoing impact on museum practice. The website (which launched in 07/12) had received some 8500 hits by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013 from a very wide range of domains and countries. There is a consistent return visit figure of 26% (and this figure is growing gradually, implying that the impact of the site is growing by word of mouth).

One of the elements that PhotoCLEC identified through its research was the lack of training, knowledge and confidence amongst museum staff in dealing with photographs, especially in relation to difficult histories. As a response in October 2011 PHRC/PhotoCLEC held a free one-day workshop open to all: '*Curating Photographs in the Museum*'. Speakers included PhotoCLEC researchers and specialist curators and archivists, including two the project had worked with. It attracted 90 curators, an international cohort of museum studies students and others.

Embedded within the PhotoCLEC project from its start was a desire to build skills in the sector, which was realised (in part) through the secondment of early career museum professionals. At DMU the project was joined by Jaina Mistry from Leicester Museums. Mistry had the opportunity to curate a display in a major museum, the Pitt Rivers in Oxford. Working with PhotoCLEC enabled her to experience a range of different museum practices, develop her skills in curating and public presentation, build professional networks and gain experience of museums in Europe. This work will form part of her portfolio for her professional Museums Association qualification. The display in Oxford 'The Colonial Album', curated by Ms Mistry presented the project's ideas to Museum visitors (88,602 in the period of the exhibition). It was the first time that this material, a series of colonial albums from a range of colonial activities in Africa, had been shown in public. The project thus extended the range of material accessible within the museum. The exhibition was shown in the museum's 'Archive Case' between January and April 2012 and is still available online.

The PhotoCLEC project worked with Leicester New Walk Museum's *Suits and Saris* exhibition (March 30-October 7 2012). Drawing on PhotoCLEC research, Edwards recorded a three-hour interview on issues around photographs in museums for Leicester Museum Services. This helped a range of staff (from curators and designers) think through the use of photographs in *Suits and Saris*. This interview will be archived in the East Midlands Oral History Archive and was directly involved in the production of a display on colonial photographs in two major provincial museums.

Through the Leicester Museum network, Edwards was invited to work with a focus group of local

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teenagers on the display of some colonial lantern slides in Tyne and Wear Museums for their Cultural Olympiad exhibition *The Curious Case of.....*. The way in which the lantern slides were presented to the public in the exhibition was a direct outcome of PhotoCLEC findings and the experience has embedded these skills within the museum.

PhotoCLEC held its final conference in one of its collaborating museums, the Pitt Rivers in Oxford. About 50% of the audience was made up of curators and archivists from a wide range of backgrounds, including some of the curators who had worked with the project. There was universally enthusiastic feedback. The conference was also used to present a draft of the website and elicit feedback from the target audiences, which fed into the final version of the website – the final outcome from the project. The conference and website were then a major influence on an exhibition held in the parc Bertrand, Geneva.

After the end of the project, and via the PhotoCLEC email address, Edwards was approached to advise on an exhibition on the colonial albums in the collections of the Royal Engineers Museum, Chatham, leading to the exhibition “*Encounter: Photograph albums and their stories*”.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### The PhotoCLEC project:

- **The PhotoCLEC project** was one of the projects selected by the AHRC to profile (under international collaborations) in its publication “The Impact of AHRC Research 2011/12”. A PDF of this document can be provided upon request. The launch of the web resource also featured on the news page – please see <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/News/Pages/New-online-photographic-resource-opens-window-on-Europes-colonial-legacy.aspx>
- More detail about the **AHRC-funded CDA** award (in partnership with the British Museum) can be seen via this link: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Pages/Alfred-Maudslay-Photography-and-the-Mimetic-Technologies-of-Archaeology-a-study-in-method-process-an.aspx> The title of the project is “Alfred Maudslay, Photography and the Mimetic Technologies of Archaeology: a study in method, process and effect” and is a case study of how photographs work within museum knowledge systems.
- The acknowledgement page on the PhotoCLEC website – <http://photoclec.dmu.ac.uk/content/acknowledgements> – lists the 30+ museums (with various different focuses) across three countries that contributed to, and directly benefitted from, the project. The evidence for number of hits and their geographical location is taken from automatic emails from the Google Analytics service. These can be made available upon request.

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**The Colonial Album display:** For more information about this display please see [http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/colonial\\_album.html](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/colonial_album.html) This link clearly illustrates the curator’s new understanding of the value of the photographs, as it states: “On the surface colonial albums are very similar, yet they reveal different experiences of the colonial past for both the photographer and those photographed. While such photographs sometimes show very difficult histories and encounters, when displayed in their original context they can also complicate how we understand the colonial past and the various kinds of social encounter it involved.”

Jaina Mistry, the curator of ‘The Colonial Album’ commented: “Working on the Photoclec project, meeting a wide range of curators, and seeing a wide range of museums, has given me the confidence to use photographic collections...which will now always inform my practice.”

**The Suits and Saris exhibition:** [text removed for publication] commented: “Working with the three [focus group] families, and the photographic curatorship workshop (organized with PhotoCLEC) in which most of them were involved, was not only very informative. It also

demonstrated that it is possible to address the colonial past in museums in collaboration with people who descended both from colonial officers and colonial subjects in a considered and non-judgemental way.” Suits and Saris exhibition is a case study on the photoCLEC website.

**Tyne and Wear Museums for their Cultural Olympiad exhibition *The Curious Case of...***

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This display has been widely commented on, for example, see <http://museumethnographersgroup.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/review-curious-case-of.html> or <http://extracurious.wordpress.com/2012/06/21/magic-lantern-slides-who-i-worked-with-12/> or N. Morse: “An Interview with the Young Curators of ‘Stories of the World’ *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 26(2013): p.40

**The final conference at the Pitt Rivers Museum** was important to the development of the exhibition in the very public space of parc Bertrand in Geneva [text removed for publication]

The official French language website for this exhibition can be seen here: <http://www.unige.ch/ses/geo/cliches-exotiques/bref.html>; however, an English language review can be accessed via this link: <http://livinginegeneva.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/cliches-exotiques-exotic-types-something-different-in-parc-bertrand/> and translations can be provided upon request.

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**Royal Engineers Museum, Chatham**

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See <http://www.re-museum.co.uk/blog/category/photography/> – the final post explicitly references several examples of Edwards’ research). This has led to an ongoing relationship with Edwards, and she is presenting the opening keynote at their project conference on 12/11/13.

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