

Object elicitation outline:

When exploring the process of post-disaster home-making, the house becomes something that is both material and imaginative. My project therefore requires a methodology that explores the importance of material culture (ie objects) in the creation and recreation of the idea of home following disaster displacement.

When setting up interviews with research participants in 2012, I invited each of my 39 participants to share with me an “important object” from their migration experience, as a way to help migrants make sense of, or express experiences and emotions which might otherwise be difficult to articulate in purely linguistic ways. Doing this allows an opportunity to understand how perhaps taken-for-granted everyday objects play a part in the recreation of home for displaced disaster victims. In the same way “the home” is seen as familiar and safe, this method was used also to investigate whether objects themselves hold emotional attachments.

My request to participants was made verbally, via a telephone call, or via email as I asked: “Please bring with you, one object, to the interview which was important to you through your displacement experience. This could be a photograph, a piece of jewelry etc.” I offered participants the opportunity to ask questions about this specific methodology emailing them the informed consent sheet so that they could read it through before the interview.

The explanation of the subject matter (‘an important object’) was deliberately vague, in order to allow the significance of objects to emerge naturally, rather than be prompted. I hoped that objects would provide a route into the certain emotions that might not have been so verbally acknowledged in an interview. The object elicitation this prompted produced a vast array of “data”, which I would not have gained with a purely straightforward interview methodology. Choosing the object before the interview also allowed participants enough time to reflect on what was important, rather than being forced to ‘talk about’ this in an immediate interview scenario.