

20. Doing violence to place: political transformation and the re-making of home

Convenors:

Stef Jansen, University of Hull
s.jansen@hull.ac.uk

Staffan Löfving, University of Stockholm
lofving@lai.su.se

Discussants:

Andy Dawson, University of Melbourne and University of Hull
a.dawson@hull.ac.uk

Fiona Ross, University of Cape Town
ross@humanities.uct.ac.za

This session investigates how displaced people engage (or don't) with the various places they inhabit during their lives, bringing together two critical concerns—the experience of violence and that of place. In particular, it questions two central assumptions underlying much anthropological and other writing on displacement.

(a) Questioning the sedentarist presumption of a universal desire to return home amongst displaced people, we call for an ethnographically informed critique of both 'return' and 'home'.

(b) Questioning the unidimensional emphasis on displacement itself as the key form of change in the lives of displaced people, we wish to highlight the importance of economic and political transformations occurring in the context left behind and of developments within displaced life trajectories themselves.

This session, then, seeks to explore contested experiences of place amongst people displaced due to various forms and degrees of violence. In addressing the issues above, we also aim to critically investigate dominant approaches to the reasons for displacement, which enforce an absolute (moral) dividing line between the experience of military violence and other forms of inequality and suffering. Instead we encourage sensitivity to issues of despair, fear, indignation and hope, undermining such comfortable dichotomies and highlighting the positionings of displaced people as both victims and agents.

'Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea'. Home, displacement and return as contested issues in the case of Elian Gonzalez

Mona Rosendahl, University of Stockholm
rosend_m@lai.su.se

In November 1999 the story of the little boy Elian Gonzalez filled newspapers and TV-newscasts around the world. Elian survived while his mother and stepfather died fleeing in a rickety boat from Havana to Miami. Immediately Elian became a pawn in a political struggle involving strong emotions surrounding Cuba as 'homeland', *patria potestad* (paternal authority) and the image of Cuba as a socialist country. There were demonstrations on the streets of Havana for his return to Cuba and outside his house in Little Havana, Miami demanding that the US government let him stay. The legal decision to send Elian back to Cuba was implemented by force of arms. In Miami the case was soon embedded in religious discourse, with the Straits of Florida as a liminal space where Elian, a Cuban *pionero* (member of the socialist children's organization)

was transformed into a saint and even a new Christ; thus constituting an efficient weapon against the Anti-Christ in the shape of Fidel Castro. Through the case of Elian Gonzalez this paper will discuss ambiguous and contested views of home, place, displacement and return.

Home and Away: The Divided Lives of Mozambican Refugees in South Africa's Lowveld Region

Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, University of the Witwatersrand

mutebi@soft.co.za

The paper will look at self-settled Mozambican refugees in South Africa's north-eastern Lowveld region, focusing on their past and present lives in Mozambique and South Africa respectively. Using testimonies collected over an 18-month period, it will examine their lived experiences at 'home' in Mozambique and how they are recalled. It will look at their experiences of departure, flight, re-settlement and (attempts at) integration over the last 15 years they have lived in South Africa, bringing together the experience of violence and of place. It will show that, whilst they are physically in South Africa and generally have no contact with Mozambique, they remain intimately connected to, and engage with, their country of origin. It will examine how all these experiences have shaped their views about life in South Africa and the desirability and practicality of returning to Mozambique. In doing so it seeks to interrogate the presumption of a universal desire among displaced persons to return to their countries of origin, and subject the idea of home to critical examination.

Coping with Displacement and Making Multiple Places. The Case of Nida (Nidden), past and present Curonian Spit (Lithuania/East Prussia)

Anja Peleikis, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale

peleikis@eth.mpg.de

Taking the example of a southeast Baltic village on the Curonian Spit, the paper will explore the question of displacement, violence and contested place-making through agency, social practice and memory of contemporary Lithuanian and former German inhabitants. Most of the village population fled the area during the 2nd World War, like millions of other Germans fleeing Central and Eastern Europe. In a rather short period of time the refugees became well integrated into post-war German society, and during the Cold War, most of them gave up their 'dream of return', while at the same time continued to live with a lot of nostalgia and homesickness. After the fall of the Iron Curtain the "lost homeland" has become far more accessible and many of the former refugees and their children have started to visit their 'place of memory'. Here they are confronted with the Lithuanian population, which also came to the village as displaced persons at the end of the 1950s. The paper will show how different, at times conflicting social actors deal with their experiences of violence, displacement and resettlement, and how they are involved in the struggle of redefining and reappropriating the present day village in times of political change and a move towards Europe.

Conflict in migration: Romanians, Moroccans and racism in Spain

Swanie Potot, University of Nice Sophia Antipolis

potot@unice.fr

Based on fieldwork on circulatory migration, this paper addresses encounters between Romanian and Moroccan economic migrants in the South of Spain. Local agriculture,

developed considerably since the 1980s, relies on large numbers of low paid day or seasonal labourers. Moroccan workers, who traditionally engaged in this, are today victims of local racism. The recent arrival of thousands of Romanians is seen by Spanish farmers as an opportunity to get rid of those older immigrants who had begun to organise themselves in trade unions. Newly arrived Romanians are considered more attractive as hired labour and seem to be less stigmatised. This situation of conflict will be examined as an illustration of the difficulties encountered by migrants in places where they will never be regarded as full citizens. For this reason, but also because their mobility is very pragmatic, Romanian migrants do not relate very much to place but are rather 'settled in mobility'. The knowledge about circulatory migration they acquire in Spain can easily be reconverted to investigate some other *niches* of employment throughout Europe, without any destabilization, as the only place they keep related to is their home in Romania.

Working at Home: Palestinian Refugees, Israeli Settlements and the Violence of Legal Boundaries

Toby Kelly, University of Oxford

tobias.kelly@csls.ox.ac.uk

This paper examines the lives of some of the former residents of the Palestinian village of Bayt Nuba. These people became displaced following the destruction of their village by the Israeli Military in 1967. Whilst most of the residents fled to Jordan and are now scattered across the Middle East, many remained in the occupied West Bank. Some have spent the intervening years working as manual labourers on the Israeli settlement that was built on the land of their former village. Notions of 'return' have long been understood as central to the Palestinian refugee issue. 'Return' has largely been understood in territorial and nationalist contexts. This paper explores what it might mean to 'return home' for these people, who have daily access to their former 'homeland'. In doing so the paper seeks to critically explore the legal boundaries of nation-states in order to understand the role of political and economic processes in experiences of displacement and the resulting effects this has on the agency of the displaced.

Poverty, Displacement, and Political Violence in Contemporary Bolivia

Lesley Gill, American University

lgill@american.edu

This paper explores displacement by examining the interconnections between "structural violence" (quotidian forms of suffering, humiliation, and oppression embodied in relationships of inequality) and political violence (the overt use of brute force by state security forces) through the lens of the Bolivian military and its support of the US-sponsored "war on drugs". The essay first considers how poverty compels young men to seek better lives by leaving their homes and dedicating a year of service to the military, which trains them to kill and frequently places them in opposition to 'their own people'. It then examines how military repression displaces impoverished peoples, drives them into poverty, and aggravates the social tensions that the military has historically been called upon to control. I argue that displacement is intimately related to the order and the disorder generated by the state and the efforts of ordinary people to forge meaningful lives in the context of the chaos imposed on them.

Place and Identity among Guatemalan Returnees

Kristi Anne Stølen, University of Oslo

k.a.stolen@sum.uio.no

Refugees are often perceived as misplaced and uprooted. Underneath these labels is the notion of a naturalized relationship between place and identity; of identities as rooted in places. This contributes to the conceptualization of territorial displacement as pathological, as something that expresses itself in different forms, such as terrorism and political crime, broken families, erosion of normal moral behavior and depression. This paper, based on fieldwork among returned refugees in Guatemala challenges this 'sedentary approach' that defines displacement not as a manifestation of a socio-political problem, but rather as an internal pathological condition of displaced persons, who thus become victims at the disposal of humanitarian intervention. The Guatemalan refugees used to live close to the border where there was no marked cultural difference following the borderline. They crossed the border because their own society was unfamiliar and strange due to war and political persecution and they did not want to return to their old communities. And for many refugees exile did not mean deprivation and victimization, but on the contrary, recognition and mobilization. These observations raise critical issues about changes in cultural identity and social relations in the face of political violence and transnationalism.

What changed and what remained the same? Contradictions of protracted exile for some Greek Cypriot IDPs

Peter Loizos, London School of Economics and Political Science

p.loizos@lse.ac.uk

The Greek Cypriots displaced in 1974 were told by their leaders that they would return one day and unity was maintained at the level of political rhetoric. However, all proposed settlements of the Cyprus problem have dealt with different sets of refugees in different ways. A group from Argaki, a village designated for return to Greek control in the Annan Plan for a reunited federal Cyprus, was found to be surprisingly ambivalent towards this. These refugees retain a strong sense of injustice about their displacement, and speak of the lost village and the social life it supported with hyperbolic enthusiasm. In this sense, they affirm an enduring attachment to a 'place'. But now that it is becoming imaginable that they might return, it is doubtful that many will do so, partly because of economic issues, and partly because what they have clung to in memory has been transformed. Not only has the original community changed decisively, but so have the refugees themselves. They left as younger men and women, and have spent so much of their lives 'outside' that any concept of 'return' is inherently emotionally confusing, fraught with cognitive difficulties and practical problems.

