

Refugees' Diasporic Memories and the Politics of Democratisation

18 February 2011, Wolfson College (Oxford) Haldane Room

The Refugee Studies Centre and the International Migration Institute of the Oxford Department of International Development are pleased to host this one-day seminar which forms part of the Oxford Diasporas Programme

While there has been extensive research on democratic transition and post-conflict reconstruction in Southern and Eastern Europe, little is known about the roles played by diasporas in general and by refugees' diasporic memories in particular. However, many states in Africa, Latin America and even Europe are engaged in attempts to reassess their recent histories in order to elaborate new nation-building narratives. In this context, refugee diasporas have often retained a memory of conflicts which has sometimes been erased (or voluntarily forgotten) in the country of origin.

The conference will address the input of refugee organisations and individuals into political processes in their countries of origin. The event will, in particular, explore:

1. The role of refugee organisations in re-processing individual memories into an alternative narrative of national history.
2. The stance of states of origin – whether they are willing or unwilling to re-incorporate this expatriate memory in the context of democratic transition.

Memorial transfers can take many forms, from public testimonies and reconciliation committees organised by states of origin, to clandestine encounters between activists and expatriates. Three questions will serve as a common thread for the different interventions:

1. How are individual memories processed in an exilic context to produce a collective diasporic memory?
2. How are diasporic memories transferred to the origin country (or, conversely, how do states endeavour to prevent re-importation of these memories)?
3. How does this process impact on public opinion, civil society and democratisation in both the country of origin and the hosting country?



This workshop is generously supported by:

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09.30–10.00	Coffee - Hall
10.00–10.15	Opening: Welcome by Thomas Lacroix (IMI) and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (RSC)
10.15–12.15	Panel 1: Processing Memories in Exile Chair: Alana Harris
	<p>Forgotten Histories: The memories of South Vietnamese female veterans (Nathalie Nguyen, Australian Centre, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne)</p> <p>Diasporic Memories and Narratives of Belonging: Cubans in Spain (Mette Louise Berg, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford)</p>
12.15–13.30	Lunch - Buttery
13.30–15.00	Panel 2: Transferring Memories Chair: Oliver Bakewell
	<p>Learning to be Bhutanese: Reproducing a Refugee Community in Exile (Rosalind Evans, Refugee Youth Project)</p> <p>Refugees' Exilic Memories and Politics of Engagement: the Palestinian Case (Abbas Shiblak, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford)</p> <p>The Politics of 'Travelling Memories': Sahrawi Youth Remembering and Memorialising Home-land and Home-camp (Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford)</p>
15.00–15.30	Coffee - Hall
15.30–17.00	Panel 3: Political Impacts of Diasporic Memories Chair: Gunvor Jonsson
	<p>Spanish Refugees and the Construction of a Memory of Spanish Immigration in France (Evelyne Ribert , Institut Interdisciplinaire d'Anthropologie du Contemporain [IIAC/CNRS])</p> <p>Massinissa, Messali Hadj and the Berber Movement: Diasporic Memories and the Rewriting of History in Contemporary Algeria (Judith Scheele, All Souls College, University of Oxford)</p> <p>Boat People and the Politics of Memory in Australia: Refugee Advocacy, the Past and the Tampa Crisis (J. Olaf Kleist, Free University Berlin)</p>
17.00–17.30	Conclusion and Final Discussions

Introduction: Refugees' Diasporic Memories and the Politics of Democratisation

Thomas Lacroix and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

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Panel One: Processing Memories in Exile

The papers in this section will explore the ways in which individual refugee memories are processed in an exilic context to produce a collective diasporic memory.

Forgotten Histories: The memories of South Vietnamese female veterans

Nathalie Nguyen

The histories of women who served in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) have been largely ignored in the vast historiography of the Vietnam War in spite of the fact that South Vietnamese women served in the armed forces from 1950 until the end of the war in 1975. This paper will explore the memories of two former servicewomen, both of whom are now resettled overseas. Their life histories illustrate the disjuncture between public and private memories of the war. Their narratives reveal that while few may be aware of their stories, these female veterans have succeeded in constructing individual discourses of their war service and post war lives and are, in the process, creating and preserving the forgotten histories of RVNAF servicewomen.

Nathalie Nguyen is an Associate Professor at the Australian Centre, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne. She was awarded two major fellowships by the Australian Research Council: an ARC Australian Research Fellowship (2005-2010) and an ARC Future Fellowship (2010-2014). Her third book *Memory Is Another Country: Women of the Vietnamese Diaspora* (Praeger, 2009) was recently recognized as a *Choice Outstanding Academic Title, 2010* (Choice, January 2011). Nathalie is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Refugee Studies Centre (University of Oxford), where she is conducting further research on Vietnamese refugees.

Diasporic Memories and Narratives of Belonging: Cubans in Spain

Mette Louise Berg

The history of the relationship between Cuba and its post-1959 diaspora has been characterised by hostility, antagonism and mutual recrimination, especially between the revolutionary government and the Miami-based exile community. Since the 1990s, the Cuban diaspora has broadened demographically to include more non-white Cubans of more diverse backgrounds socio-economically; it has also become clear that the diaspora was always more diverse than dominant representations allowed for. This paper focuses on Cubans in Spain, arguing that the historical connections between Cuba and Spain, including colonialism and the post-colonial history of Spanish migration to Cuba in the early twentieth century created a different background to that of the US, against which Cubans settled in Spain post-1959. Since the 1990s, Spain has become an important site for diasporic cultural production and for envisioning relations between the island and its diaspora. The paper argues that diasporic Cubans in Spain, through transnational practices and narratives of belonging, are forging new ways of being Cuban, and of conceiving the relationship between diaspora and homeland.

Mette Louise Berg is a Departmental Lecturer in the Anthropology of Migration at the University of Oxford, and is also affiliated to the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) within the University. Mette holds a Masters' degree in anthropology from Copenhagen and a DPhil from Oxford. She has previously taught at the University of St Andrews. Mette has carried out research on Cuba and its diaspora since 1998. Her monograph *Diasporic Generations: Memory, Politics and Nation among Cubans in Spain* is in press with Berghahn Books. Her research interests include the anthropology of migration, diasporas, and transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, gender and generation, and social memory.

Panel Two: Transferring Memories

In this section, the papers will examine the ways in which refugees' diasporic memories are transferred to their country/context of origin (or, conversely, how states endeavour to prevent re-importation of these memories).

Learning to be Bhutanese: Reproducing a Refugee Community in Exile

Rosalind Evans

This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork with Bhutanese refugees who have lived in long-term camps in eastern Nepal since the early 1990s. Many young refugees left their nation as infants or were born in the camps. Until relatively recently, most refugees expressed their desire to return to their nation, yet bilateral negotiations between the Nepalese and Bhutanese governments have failed to achieve this outcome. Since early 2008 over 37,000 refugees, approximately a third of the total community, have been resettled to the United States and other third countries. This paper is largely based on research conducted between 2006 and 2008, when the refugee community was divided over whether or not to accept the resettlement offer or to continue the struggle to return to Bhutan through peaceful or violent means. The paper focuses on the experiences of young refugees, many of whom have never set foot in Bhutan, growing up in the camps. It draws on theories of social memory and cultural representations of history to explore how Bhutanese children develop a desire to 'return' home, acquire a sense national identity, and learn about the conflict which precipitated their families' flight. This involves comparing refugee adults' memories of the events leading up to refugee exodus, with the dominant narratives told in the camps and taught to children in camp schools. Whereas some refugee adults describe two sides to the conflict precipitating their flight from Bhutan, the story presented by refugee organisations depicts the community as innocent victims of an autocratic regime, which crushed their peaceful protests. Refugee children's cultural expression (song, poetry, art and drama) about their country and the events leading to their family's departure to Nepal provides an understanding of how a collective diasporic memory is produced in the Bhutanese camps and transmitted to the next generation. The role played by these collective versions of the past in informing young refugees' present-day political commitments is also explored.

Rosalind Evans completed an MSc in Forced Migration at the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre in 2004-2005 and completed her doctorate in Development Studies at Oxford University in 2009. Her research explored the impact of child-focused participatory projects on Bhutanese refugee children living in camps and she spent a year conducting fieldwork in Nepal. Most recently, Roz has been completing project and youth work with young refugees in London. She has also worked with refugees as a legal adviser in Egypt, and as an English teacher and project worker with young refugees in Lebanon. She is a co-founder of the *Refugee Youth Project*

Refugees Exilic Memories and Politics of Engagement: The Palestinian case

Abbas Shiblak

For many Palestinians, the loss of their homeland and their dispersal marked their lives with collective trauma. Although a few of them managed to integrate well in their Arab host societies, the majority are subjected to institutional discrimination or are still live under an occupation that makes them aliens in their own country. In this paper I will examine the features that influenced the transformation of Palestinian diasporic memories, exploring what formats or shapes it has taken over time. I will also identify which features Palestinian diasporic memories share or are different from those memories we associate with other diasporas? What, if anything, is the uniqueness of Palestinian diasporic experience in not having state of their own and what effect has this feature had on the re-importation of their diasporic memories and their engagement with their country of origin?

Abbas Shiblak

For many years, Abbas Shiblak worked as the Director of Palestinian Affairs in the League of Arab States and was later a founder and the first Director of the Palestinian Refugee and Diaspora Centre (Shaml) in Ramallah, dedicated to the study of the Palestinian Diaspora. During the last few years, Shiblak has been working on issues of migration, displacement and statelessness especially in the Middle East.

His most recent publications include a new edition of his book on the Iraqi Jewish community exodus, the Palestinian Communities in Europe; Challenges of Adaptation and Identity, and a forthcoming book entitled 'Citizens, Sub-citizens and Non-citizens; the issue of statelessness in the Arab Region'. Shiblak read law and sociology in Egypt and in the UK. He is a Research Associate at Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.

The Politics of 'Travelling Memories': Sahrawi youth remembering and memorializing home-land and home-camp

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

Drawing on primary research conducted with Sahrawi children and youth in Spain, Cuba, Syria and the Sahrawi refugee camps (Algeria) between 2001 and 2009, this paper explores the Sahrawi politics of "travelling memories," assessing how, why and to what effect memories of both the Western Saharan *home-land* and of the Algerian-based *home-camps* "travel" between older and younger generations and across geographies in contexts of ongoing mobility. I start by exploring the ways in which Sahrawi children and youth "inherit" and negotiate memories of their home-land and home-camps when they are temporarily separated from their families for educational purposes. In particular, I ask whether the transmission of memories in such contexts of separation takes place *in spite of* children's distance from their families and home camps, or *because of* this. I then examine the ways in which youth's memories "travel" with them to their refugee home-camps upon graduation, analyzing how their memories relate to those prioritised both by the international community mandated to secure a political solution to the protracted conflict, and by the older Sahrawis who monopolise not only the political infrastructure in the refugee camps, but also the "official memory" of home-land and home-camps alike. Overall, I argue that the transmission of memories of the home-land are complemented and at times superseded by the development of and longing for memories of youth's home-camps. As such, multiple processes of memory-making and memory-recuperating underpin diverse political commitments to a plurality of home-spaces, including both the home-land and the home-camp. Recognising the intersecting and at times conflicting nature of memories of home-land and home-camp leads us to question the implicit assumption that political mobilisation revolves around memories of the home-land alone, or that the home-land should itself be the focus of political action and change.

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh is a Departmental Lecturer in Forced Migration at the Refugee Studies Centre (University of Oxford), where she completed her DPhil in 2009. She holds an undergraduate degree Cambridge University, and post-graduate degrees from the London School of Economics and Political Science, the University of New South Wales (Sydney), and the Universitat Abierta de Catalunya (Spain). From February 2009 to September 2010 Elena was Senior Teaching Fellow in Development Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), and until January 2009 she was Research Fellow in Diaspora Mobilisation and International Security at the Department of Politics and International Studies (also at the School of Oriental and African Studies). She has previously worked as a legal advisor for refugees in Cairo, as a refugee case-worker with Amnesty International Australia's Refugee Team, and as a legal clerk at the International Criminal Court, conducting research on crimes committed in Darfur (Sudan). Her work has been published in the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *Interventions: international journal of postcolonial studies*, the *Journal of North African Studies* and *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, in

addition to appearing in a number of edited collections

Panel Three: Political Impacts of Diasporic Memories

In this final section, the contributions will critically assess the impact which the above processes have on public opinion, civil society and democratisation both in the country of origin and in the country of exile?

Spanish Refugees and the Construction of a Memory of Spanish Immigration in France

Evelyne Ribert

For about 15 years, several associations and a federation of Spanish immigrants have been developing initiatives to protect and promote the memory of Spanish immigration - including labour immigration - in France. Such actions are unusual among economic immigrants in general. Why do these associations and this federation thus value the memory of the immigration? The present fieldwork shows that the interest lies in relation with the movement called "the recovery of historic memory" in Spain, and is explained by the presence of a few refugees within these associations and the federation. The latter can then use the historical research which it funded to defend, in Spain, the rights of Spanish emigrants. As such, Spanish refugees and emigrants in France played an important role in the drafting of the 2006 law on the status of Spanish citizens abroad, presenting economic emigrants as victims of Francoism.

Evelyne Ribert is a sociologist at CNRS and member of the Institut Interdisciplinaire d'Anthropologie du Contemporain. She has worked on the representation of national belonging among French-based youth of immigrant backgrounds. More recently, she has studied memories of Spanish immigration in France. Her publications include *Liberté, égalité, carte d'identité, Les jeunes issus de l'immigration et l'appartenance nationale* (Paris, La Découverte, 2006). With M. Baussant and N. Venel, Evelyne co-authored the report *Mémoire de l'émigration, mémoire des migrations, mémoire des luttes sociales : trois formes de patrimonialisation de la mémoire de l'immigration en France* (ENSANS, Ministry of Culture and Communication, 2009).

Massinissa, Messali Hadj and the Berber Movement: diasporic memories and the rewriting of history in contemporary Algeria

Judith Scheele, All Souls College

In Kabylia, a Berber-speaking rural area just east of Algiers, history both pervades all aspects of life and politics, and is strikingly absent. Official history, as everybody readily agrees, is made up of lies, invented to maintain unequal power relations. Conversely, true knowledge of 'real' history would not only throw light on the past, but also indicate a way out of the quagmires of the present. As truth, as if by definition, always lies elsewhere, historical sources sent back via refugees and emigrants resident in Paris play an important part in the rewriting of local history, to the point where, from a local point of view, official history is often turned on its head: national heroes appear as regional villains. At the same time, however, history is denied any historicity, but rather valued for the structural patterns people detect in it: history becomes a discourse of eternal resistance, and of a permanent search for truth beyond the local.

Judith Scheele, a social anthropologist, is a post-doctoral Research Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. Her doctoral research focused on notions of knowledge, political legitimacy and community in Kabylia, Algeria. Her current research investigates trans-Saharan connections of all kinds, including legal and illegal trade, migration, and scholarly links, with particular emphasis on southern Algeria and northern Mali. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in both countries. Her publications include *Village Matters: Knowledge, Politics and Community in Kabylia* (Oxford, 2009), and various related book chapters and articles.

Boat People and the Politics of Memory in Australia: refugee advocacy, the past and the Tampa crisis

J. Olaf Kleist (Free University Berlin)

Memories are a crucial instrument in debates about refugee policies that refer, more often than not, to experiences of refugees. While sometimes memories serve rejections of asylum seekers they mostly advocate the acceptance and inclusion of refugees in the receiving society. In this sense, memories of refugees contribute also to the democratic process of the host country. In this paper, I will show how memories were used in different ways to support refugees in Australia. I will distinguish political implications of memories by their various reasonings about why protection should be offered and under which conditions. I will present three examples of refugee advocacy that all relate to a political conflict about boat people, the 2001 Tampa debate. First, I will show how memories were presented in a pro-refugee campaign during the Tampa Crisis, employing iconography of national memory. Secondly, I will discuss how memories of the Tampa affaire's refugee policies were employed for political ends in an annual rally. Finally, I will analyse a memorial to the victims of a refugee boat that sank on its way to Australia, the so-called SIEV-X, and its relevance for Australian belonging and refugees. I will frame these case studies with considerations about the political functions and implications of memories for refugees and their own memories.

J. Olaf Kleist is a doctoral candidate at Free University Berlin and a Visiting Fellow at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. He has published journal articles and book chapters on political memories and on migration and is currently co-editing a book entitled 'History, Memory and Migration', to be published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Panel One Chair Alana Harris

Alana Harris is the Darby Fellow in History at Lincoln College, she teaches nineteenth and twentieth century British and European history, as well as a variety of other methodological and theoretical papers on the practice and discipline of history. Her doctoral dissertation, completed in October 2008 and examined by Professors Jose Harris and Hugh McLeod, examined the transformations in the spirituality and social identity of Catholics in England following the Second World War, through the Second Vatican Council, until the National Pastoral Council and historic papal visit in the 1980s. Utilizing the evolving methodological insights of English, American and Australian intellectual and cultural historians studying 'lived religion', it explored changes in Catholic devotional practice and popular piety throughout the period and the ways in which these intersect with broader changes in British society. Elements from this research have already been published in part, but she is also working on a manuscript deriving from this research.

Panel Two Chair – Oliver Bakewell

Oliver Bakewell has been working with refugees and migrants for over fifteen years as both a researcher and practitioner. His research interests include the changing patterns of migration within Africa; the relationship between migration and development; the interplay between structure and agency in migration theory; and forced migration, repatriation and humanitarian aid. He holds a PhD and MSc in Development Studies and a BA in Mathematics.

Panel Three Chair – Gunvor Jonsson

Gunvor Jonsson obtained her MPhil in anthropology in 2007 from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. For her thesis, she conducted five months of anthropological fieldwork in a village in the Kayes region of Mali. The thesis deals with migration aspirations and involuntary immobility, focusing particularly on young men of Soninke ethnicity. She also holds a BA and an Honours degree in anthropology from the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Her dissertation focused on the construction of young women's sexuality and was based upon fieldwork in a village in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Apart from her studies in anthropology, Gunvor has studied German, communication, and French. She has also worked as an intern and student assistant at the Danish Institute for Human Rights.