

The Impact of Diasporas

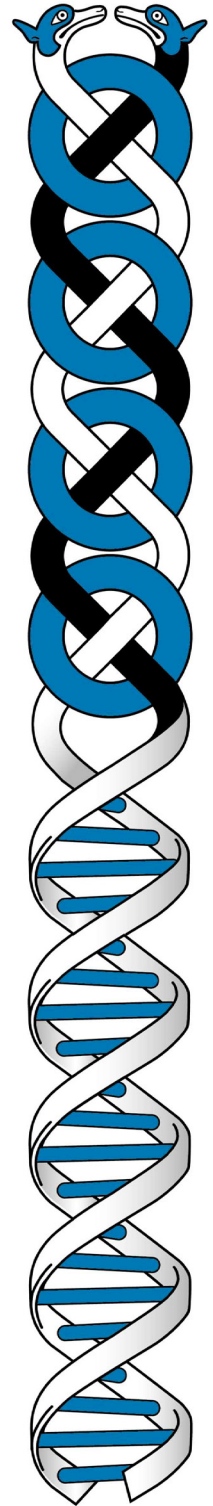
17 September 2015 | The Royal Geographic Society

Programme

- 9.30 Registration, coffee and poster display
- 10.30 Welcome from Gordon Marshall, Robin Cohen and Joanna Story
- 11.00 Parallel session: Home and Away
Parallel session: Coming and Going
- 13.00 Lunch and poster display
- 14.00 Parallel session: Remembering and Forgetting
Parallel session: Lost and Found
- 16.00 Coffee break and poster display
- 16.30 Keynote lecture: Thomas Hylland Eriksen (University of Oslo)
- 18.00 Presentations by Robin Cohen and Joanna Story
- 19.00 Drinks reception

Find out more and register online

www.migration.ox.ac.uk/odp/impact-of-diasporas-event.shtml



The Leverhulme Trust



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Home and away

11.00–13.00

Tactical diasporas: finding a place in African cities

Oliver Bakewell & Naluwembe Binaisa

In this paper we examine the different approaches adopted by people from West Africa and the Horn of Africa as they establish themselves in two African capital cities, Lusaka and Kampala. We will show how people's attempts to sustain and reproduce links with their homeland, and the people of the homeland, are shaped as much by concerns with securing their livelihoods as any affective bond. We will also show how the particular histories and socio-economic landscape of these two cities affects the diasporic relationships that people are inclined to form. We conclude by suggesting how the findings from these African cases provide valuable counterpoints to the common assumptions made about diasporas of African origin outside the continent.

Diaspora youth: difference, diversity and precarious employment

Linda McDowell, Abby Hardgrove & Esther Rootham

Although levels of unemployment in the UK have declined in the last two years or so, rates among young people aged 18–24, especially among minority young men, have remained high. In this presentation, we explore the position of diaspora young men of South Asian heritage, looking at their strategies for finding waged work in the post-recession years. It has been argued that personal contacts are an important way of finding work in diaspora groups. What became evident, on the basis of interviews with both BAME and white British men in Swindon and Luton, was the extent of diversity among the men to whom we talked. These men, identified as unemployed or in precarious work, were, variously, single, boyfriends, fathers, students, immigrants, British, Muslim, Christian, Portuguese (by passport), living at home, and living alone, reinforcing and deepening arguments about intersectionality and key dimensions of difference.

Unpacking statelessness: negotiating scales, meanings and institutional practices

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Nando Sigona

Since the early 2000s statelessness witnessed a policy and academic revival. However the process has been largely top-down, led by international humanitarian agencies and a handful of legal and policy scholars. The plight of over 12 million stateless persons worldwide has been interpreted mostly through a humanitarian lens resulting, we argue, in an overwhelming emphasis on individual stories, the atomisation of communities and the depoliticisation of the causes of statelessness. This process resembles in a number of ways the institutionalisation of refugees and the construction of the refugee as a depoliticised pure victim acutely captured in the 1990s by Liisa Malkii. Taking as a point of departure three differently stateless communities – Kurds, Palestinians and Roma – in France, Italy, Sweden and the UK, we engage with statelessness from the bottom-up, highlighting the diverse and often deeply political meanings of the term, how these intersect current policy and practice of institutionalisation in the EU and how communities act upon them.

Linguistic variation in early Anglo-Saxon England: searching for small data solutions

Martin Findell

The quantity of data attesting 'pre-Old English' (a problematic label for the varieties of Germanic language spoken in Britain in the early Anglo-Saxon period) is very small, consisting chiefly of a limited number of short runic inscriptions on portable objects. It has been common in English historical linguists to fill the gaps in our knowledge of what this language was like by using well-established methods of linguistic reconstruction. These methods, however, are designed for explaining regular, patterned changes in a language system. This project attempts to approach the problem from the other end of the historical telescope, proceeding from micro-readings of individual texts and pursuing more localised accounts of their production and use. This in turn allows us to think about early diasporic communities of Germanic speakers in Britain in a more localised and personalised way, self-consciously distancing ourselves from the traditional narratives of medieval historiography and modern nationalism in which the basic unit of human society is the gens or nation.

Spheres of diaspora engagement in conflict settings

Nicholas Van Hear & Giulia Liberatore

The degree of congruence between the perceptions and aspirations of people in diaspora and the perspectives of those who remain in the country of origin has long been a matter of debate, especially in conflict contexts. In this paper we argue that a disaggregation of diaspora engagement into three different 'spheres' – the household, known community and imagined community – can help to unpack different orders of connection and disconnection between the diaspora and those at home, revealing the conditions and circumstances that generate common ground as well as rendering them at odds with one another in conflict settings. Drawing on the examples of the Tamil and Somali diasporas, we trace the interrelations between different spheres and the ways in which these have shifted over time. Whilst the Tamil case points to a growing individualisation of diaspora engagement since the end of the war in 2009, the Somali case reveals a shift towards growing collectivisation among the younger members of the diaspora. These discrepancies are examined by connecting micro processes relating to the diaspora's capacity and desire to engage, with macro processes relating to the nature of post-conflict society, and the impact of transnational institutions, policies and discourses.

Coming and Going

11.00–13.00

The animators: explaining the political mobilisation of diasporas in Africa

Alexander Betts & Will Jones

In this paper we seek to understand the circumstances under which diasporic political mobilisation takes place through a comparison of two African diasporas: Zimbabweans since 2000, and Rwandans since 1994. We argue that a key (usually omitted) part of the explanation is the role of elite outsiders who pump resources and energy into mobilising diasporic communities in particular ways: animators. Based on extensive multi-sited fieldwork carried out over two years in South Africa, Botswana, Uganda, the UK, Belgium, and France with funding from the Leverhulme Trust, we trace the recent historical evolution of these transnational communities. We show how, far from being static or permanent, diasporas are inherently political entities that have dynamic 'lifecycles'; they are born, they live, they die, and they even have afterlives. Their existence and the forms they take are historically and politically contingent. Crucially, these lifecycles, and the durability of the diaspora, are determined not by the inherent qualities of the diaspora but by the role of elite 'animators', who make resources available to the diaspora.

Nairobi's Little Mogadishu: Eastleigh and the making of a Somali global hub

Neil Carrier

Eastleigh is a Nairobi estate that has been at the centre of an East African commercial revolution. Once primarily an Indian estate, waves of migrants from Somalia and the Somali regions of northern Kenya have brought Somali identity to the fore, so much so that some dub the estate 'Little Mogadishu'. Somali influence has also connected the estate into vast transnational trade networks and into a global diaspora, turning it into a place of commerce where over 40 shopping malls now sell a large variety of goods, satisfying East African demand in particular for the cheap clothes of China. All this development has been greeted with much ambivalence within Kenya, and suspicions of links to piracy and terrorism colour perceptions of the estate and those who live and trade there. In this paper we explore the social underpinnings of the Eastleigh transformation and the wider implications of this ambiguous diaspora-led development.

DNA and past migrations: storytelling or story testing?

Rita Rasteiro

Migration has always influenced the population of the British Isles. Since the late Iron Age there have been several phases of migration from different parts of mainland Europe. Each had a different impact on the making of Britain and the genetic contribution to the modern British gene pool is still subject to much debate both in academic literature and popular culture. Frequently, the interpretation of patterns of genetic diversity has been used to study the migration history of populations. However, randomness and past demography can lead to misleading patterns and to subjective and/or biased interpretations. Here I outline another approach to study migration in the British Isles, where we explicitly test hypotheses informed by other disciplines, using computer simulations and statistical techniques.

The Hadramis abroad: a 'diaspora for others'

Iain Walker

Over the past two or three decades, the term "diaspora" has come to be applied to almost any group of people away from home. While there are all sorts of reasons, some very good, for this extension of usage from the original short list of Jews, Armenians and a handful of others, as is so often the case, the analytical acuity of the term is dulled somewhat in the process. What seems particularly to have been lost is the characteristic Hadramis have been instrumental in shaping – indeed, often introducing – Islam throughout the Indian Ocean, and Hadramis have long supplied religious leadership to their host communities. In southeast Asia, a significant proportion of Hadramis were, and remain, of the upper strata of society, the sada and the mashaykh. In East Africa, however, the majority of Hadramis are of more modest origins, members of the lower social strata in Hadramawt who migrated to East Africa in search of work and who, once there, often engaged in petty trading and manual labour.

Genetic markers as evidence of past expansions

Jon Wetton

Modern populations carry hidden within their DNA partial records of past events. Whilst we share 99.9 per cent of our DNA sequence many of the differences between individuals originated as novel mutations in a single ancestor which has been passed down among their descendants whose shared ancestry is apparent from their possession of the genetic marker and whose current geographic distribution reflects the dispersion of that lineage. Improvements in genetic technology are rapidly uncovering many additional markers increasing the detail and precision with which we can detect these lineages. Examples will be presented of markers on the paternally inherited Y chromosome and maternally transmitted mitochondrial DNA which provide clues to past movements and expansions to which other types of evidence, material or cultural, can provide context and sophisticated modelling of genetic data can provide testable hypotheses regarding their timing and source.

Remembering and Forgetting

14.00–16.00

Creolized futures or the appeal of purity? Processes of transmission in Euro-Senegalese families

Hélène Neveu Kringelbach

This contribution draws on an ODP project on transnational and bi-national families between Europe and Senegal (Euro-Senegalese families). Processes of transmission are examined by looking at how ‘mixed’ families negotiate what languages and religious practices will be passed on to the next generations. What, exactly, may be ‘transmitted’ when language and religious practice are new to one of the parents? How do individual parents make sense of their conversion to Islam (for European men married to Senegalese Muslim women) in contexts which may range from strongly Muslim (Senegal) to anti-Muslim (France)? Drawing on ethnographic material on families living in Senegal and families located in France or the UK, this paper allows for a re-examination of the importance of context in cultural transmission.

A tale of two speech communities: the linguistic legacy of the Viking-Age Scandinavian diaspora in late-medieval Wirral and Cumbria

Eleanor Rye

Place-names, historical texts and archaeological finds have long been used as evidence for Scandinavian settlement in Britain during the Viking Age but, in recent years, genetic studies of Scandinavian ancestry have complemented these ‘traditional’ sources of evidence. This paper will consider what can be learnt about the legacy of Scandinavian settlement in two areas of north-west England by combining two of these sources of evidence, place-names and genetics.

- How do place-names reflect Scandinavian settlement in the Wirral and Cumbria?
- How does this relate to genetic and other evidence for Scandinavian immigration in the areas?

Living with difference: from diaspora to creolization

Olivia Sheringham

In this paper I explore the relationship between the concepts of, and social practices related to creolization – referring to processes of cultural exchange and the emergence of new languages and cultures – and diaspora in four different settings. Creolized and diasporic identities are two possible identity ‘trajectories’ which seem to contradict each other, to diverge. Diaspora’s pull to an original homeland and relationship to the past seems to contrast with creolization’s erosion of old roots and creation of something fresh and new in a new context. Both concepts have been closely related to particular historical and geographical contexts, with strong debates over their wider conceptual or empirical application. Drawing on empirical research conducted in Louisiana, Mauritius, Martinique and Cape Verde, as well as some reflections on contemporary manifestations of creolization and diaspora, in this paper I will consider some of the ways in which creolized and diasporic identities interact with each other in subtle ways, in different spatial and temporal contexts, sometimes diverging and at times converging. Focusing more fully on the concept of creolization, I will consider some of the ways in which it could be used beyond its original context in ways that do not dilute its meaning and undermine its conceptual depth. Finally, I will put forward three reasons why creolization – mindful of its relationship with diaspora – could be a useful concept for analysing identity in the contemporary world, and for addressing some of the challenges of living in ever more super-diverse spaces, for example in today’s ‘global cities.’

Remembering Knútr in England and Scandinavia

Pragya Vohra

In 1016, a Scandinavian king ascended to throne of the then relatively recently established English kingdom. Canute the Great, or Knútr inn ríki as he is known in the Norse tradition, is generally regarded as having established a short-lived Anglo-Scandinavian Empire, bringing together his English and Scandinavian conquests with his Danish inheritance. Despite being born in and closely connected with Denmark, Knútr spent a large proportion of his time in his 'new' home, England, going away only a handful of times. Was he then primarily an English king who just happened to be born Scandinavian? Or was he a Scandinavian king who favoured his first foothold? In this paper I am concerned with the memorialisation of the identity of the king responsible for the political coalescence of parts of the North Sea kingdoms which already showed cultural affinities. While some of the memorialisation is contemporary, some comes from later traditions, and it is the aim here to unpick what was remembered, how it was remembered and, if possible, how much was forgotten about a figure who was associated with a large part of the Viking diaspora.

Lost and Found

14.00–16.00

Shared devotions: space, faith and community in East London

Nazneen Ahmed, Jane Garnett, Ben Gidley, Alana Harris & Michael Keith

East London – an arrival quarter in a global port city – is in many ways a paradigmatic diasporic space. Its story is often told through the succession of ethnic and faith groups who have migrated into the area. This history is sedimented in the urban landscape of the area, which can be read as a palimpsest revealing and concealing the transnational history of the metropolis. This is exemplified in the way that many buildings in East London which have been used as places of worship and community congregation by different religious traditions and migrant communities at various points in time. The evolution of these shared spaces reflects demographic shifts, local changes in religious practice, and the ways in which communities have negotiated public space and resources in East London, and Britain, over a period of over two hundred years. In this paper, based on a forthcoming book to be published by English Heritage from the research done as part of the Oxford Diaspora Programme, we trace the rich history and the lived realities of these shared spaces of faith, examining the ways in which buildings have been adapted for different religious traditions and community uses. We ask: what has been lost, adapted, conserved as East London has undergone change after change over the last two hundred years? We show how the adaptability of faith communities can be traced in the creative ways in which different communities have used the public spaces of streets, parks, docks, ships and cemeteries in order to worship, practise religious rituals, undertake processions and bury their dead – in doing so, sometimes self-consciously and often unconsciously retreading the steps of others before them.

Lost and found in Anglo-Saxon England: when do the travels of objects reflect the travels of people?

Morn Capper

There are many markers of identity and of the movement of peoples. Objects with particular decorative styles or characteristics are often taken by archaeologists and historians as evidence of the movement of peoples and ideas in the past, be it through the migration of peoples, through trade or through influences via cultural contact. Loss and rediscovery of medieval objects in the present may cause reconsideration of local and diasporic identities which may be re-discovered and re-imagined. However, such finding may be a complex process, and we may explore whether this represents a

faithful rediscovery and re-connection in the modern day or self selected re-imagining of connections to promote modern needs and narratives. Modern discoveries by archaeologists and metal detectorists have indicated the presence of objects with Early Medieval styles of decoration associated with depicting particular identities of ethnic or social status in Anglo-Saxon England. In one such case study objects associated with Irish identity have been recovered from across the midlands. However, what can these tell us of the movement of Irish missionaries and traders, of later Viking raiders, or of the objects on their own as objects of status or curiosity? Without sufficient context, do such objects tell us anything about the movement of peoples in the early medieval past and what narratives are told about them in the present?

Explaining the rise of diaspora institutions

Alan Gamlen

Why do states establish and empower diaspora engagement institutions? Origin-state institutions dedicated to emigrants and their descendants have been largely overlooked in mainstream political studies, perhaps because they fall in the grey area between domestic politics and international relations. Now, diaspora institutions are found in over half of all United Nations member states, yet we have little theory and broad-sample statistical evidence to guide our understanding about when they are more likely to emerge and increase in importance. In response, we identify and then investigate empirical support for three theoretically-grounded perspectives on diaspora institution emergence and importance: one depicts instrumentally rational states tapping resources of emigrants and their descendants; another shows value-rational states embracing missing members of the nation-state; a third suggests that institutionally-converging states are governing diasporas consistent with global norms.

Remembering a Viking past: DNA as 'unforgetting' migration

Marc Scully

The increasing public awareness of DNA as a means of understanding migration in the past has led to something of a boom in 'applied genetic history', where individuals seek to create links through genetics with specific migrant groups. This paper arises from interviews with men in Yorkshire who had undergone genetic testing with the expectation that it would confirm 'Viking ancestry'. In it I explore how their narratives draw on a collective memory of Yorkshire's 'Viking Past' and also suggest that such uses of DNA involve a recasting or 'unforgetting' of Britain as a nation of migrants, and as such position Yorkshire, and Britain as a 'diaspora space' throughout time.