

1 Session at ACHS (Hangzhou, 1-6 Sep 18)

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Archaeologies of Displacement: Heritage, Memory, Materiality

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Displacement and forced migrations were a major feature of the 20th century in many regions of the world and are increasing rather than decreasing in the second decade of the 21st century. Civil wars, conflicts and political unrest have all created movements of refugees and internally displaced people. Other people have fled their homes due to famine, environmental disasters, nuclear or chemical disasters, or major development projects, such as dam building. Currently, the seemingly endless cycle of violence and conflicts in the Middle East has served to create a humanitarian catastrophe. More than 10 million people have left their homes and have been internally displaced or sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Others have made their way through the Mediterranean to reach Northern Europe, stirring up political tensions and debates about the rights of migrants and refugees.

The concept of involuntary displacement offers a powerful tool with which to explore the identities of exiled groups. A close consideration of the mechanisms of forced migration allows us to understand how the decay and loss of material objects such as personal possessions and photographs, which are invested with individual memories, compromise the ability to recall or come to terms with a difficult past life.

Many displaced refugees and migrants seek to safeguard their cultural identities by attempting to maintain contact with their homeland. This can lead to the creation of 're-invented ethnicities' where nostalgic memories of a homeland are added to and embellished in a place of sanctuary. In some cases, the assertion of alien identities can lead to ethnic tensions and hinder integration into new communities. It can also lead to distrust and the segregation or ghettoization of incoming migrants and refugees.

This session aims to understand how and why the voices of displaced people are so often forgotten in the narratives of globalisation. We will focus on how the trauma of forced migration creates

interconnections between material objects, memories, oral histories and people and explore the potential for creating sustainable archaeologies of displacement. Finally, we will examine how the authentic voices and testimonies of refugees can be used to revive the forgotten and unexplored narratives of global displacement.

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