Panel 17: **Beyond the Disaster Discourse: Redrawing Borders of "Us" vs. "Them" in the Migration Debate**

Thursday 17, 16.30-18-45, Aula A7

Convenors: **Lucia Volk** (San Francisco State University), **Khaldun Bshara** (Riwaq, Palestine)

Discussant: **Francesco Vacchiano** (Instituto de Ciencias Sociais)

This interdisciplinary panel seeks to go beyond the "us" vs. "them" binary generated in mainstream refugee and migration discourses in order to break through the "disaster discourse" prevalent in the media and in some scholarship. Participants are invited to focus on "us" and/or the "other" and challenge stereotypical or generalizing tendencies in (social) media or academic texts. What does it mean to speak of "migrants" or "refugees" as a community? What does "Europe," the "West" or the nation-state stand for? What is the relationship between long-term migrants and new refugees from a similar or from different places of origin? What is the relationship of parents and children within migrant or host societies, or how do women relate to men within communities of migrants or host societies? What role do bureaucracy and political economy play in host countries in hosting refugees? Who competes for what funds? The focus will remain on borders and divisions, but on a different kind, in order to present a more nuanced and complicated picture of immigration politics and realities. Additional objectives include both methodological and epistemological issues: can we change immigration debates by changing the way we as researcher draw the boundaries we put at the center of our investigations? And what can we learn from conflicts that run within communities? The scope of the panel is both historical and contemporary, ideally in equal measure, so as to allow discussants to analyze pattern of change over time.

Paper givers:

1) **Lucia Volk** (San Francisco State University), *"Not like Saxony": (Re)Emerging German Boundaries in Response to the Migration Crisis*

    Migration creates new geographies: homes are abandoned, makeshift shelters appear along migration routes, traffickers and refugees challenge national boundaries by crossing them without proper permission, and people move into and disrupt political, legal and socio-cultural spaces in nation-states. In receiving countries, where refugees are processed, various stake holders – political parties, civic organizations, celebrities, religious leaders, migration officials, and concerned citizens – deal with migrants in locally specific ways. In Germany, the "migration crisis" of 2015, coincidentally the 25th anniversary of German unification, opened rifts between states in the former East and the West. In particular, "the East" became a symbol of "the other Germany" that did not welcome foreigners, objected to religious and cultural pluralism, and undermined democratic and constitutional principles. Although states in the eastern part of Germany took in fewer refugees than the rest of Germany, their public demonstrations against refugees were the most heavily televised, revealing deep fractures in Germany's national fabric.   The paper is based on three months of fieldwork conducted in Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden in the summer of 2015, and includes an analysis of public

debates on TV and in the newspapers, as well as interviews with volunteers and officials in various migrant organizations.

2) **Khaldun Bshara** (Riwaq, Palestine), *Temporality and Territoriality in the "Othering" Processes of Palestinian Refugees*

This paper explores the ways in which different waves of Palestinian refugees were made into the "other" within their host societies and countries. I argue that the making of refugees into a distinct spatio-socio-economic-political group created an intentional divide of "them" (the refugees) versus "us" (the host societies or governments) and I aim to unpack the binary divide and highlight subjectivities hidden within the grand political and humanitarian discourses. I highlight the processes through which refugees were made into the "other," and cast as a social anomaly and an economic burden, as well as a threat to the political order of the hosting regimes. The "othering" of refugees aims to produce docile subjects in conformity with the respective social or political order. Methodologically, I employ ethnography to navigate between different generations of Palestinian refugees across three different moments of exile: on the move (de-territorialized), settling (re-territorialized) and normalized (territorialized). By contrasting refugee temporalities, and identifying key moments in the refugees' itinerary, I am able to deconstruct reified subjects on one hand, and help us understand the making and the sustaining of the categories "them" and "us," on the other.

3) **Dalia Abdelhady** (Lund University), *Newspaper Coverage of the Refugee: Divergent Discourses over Time and Space*

Media discourse shapes people's knowledge, attitudes, and actions towards migration and in various parts of the world. With regards to the recent mass displacements of people from the Middle East, "a disaster discourse" can be easily identified in much of media coverage in neighboring countries as well as European news. In order to deconstruct and systematically challenge such a discourse, this paper offers an in-depth analysis of newspaper coverage in four countries (Jordan, Turkey, Italy and Sweden) over a ten-year period (2005-2015). Three newspapers were chosen from each context to represent differences in the political spectrum present in country. Despite the large amount of data on which this paper relies, qualitative methods (grounded theory and discourse analysis) are used in order to offer an in-depth view into the ways the Other is constructed in different contexts and for different social and political purposes. Such differences are significant in understanding that boundaries between "us" and "them" are often malleable and incoherent, which opens up spaces where such boundaries can be contested and ultimately reconfigured in creative ways. Some of these contestations in the discourses were subsequently adopted by refugee advocacy movements such as "Refugees Welcome."

4) **Alexandra D'Onofrio** (University of Manchester), *Reaching New Horizons: Creative Anthropological Approaches in Exploring and Representing Existential Possibilities of Migration and Movement*

My paper is a methodological investigation into people's interior and imaginative worlds, as they narrate their lived experiences of migration. If we are to understand human migration experiences, as anthropologists, we need to find ways to investigate and describe realms of being, that go beyond the visible, the factual, and the verbal. Throughout my fieldwork in Milan with three Egyptian migrants and many years of working with people traveling without documents, I noticed informants recounting their own stories with reference to perceptions that fell out of the linear structure of a coherent narrative, and went beyond a predictable temporal succession of events. To render those narratives while staying true to how they were delivered, I drew on methods from creative storytelling practices, to filmmaking and animation. For this presentation I will share examples of migrant narratives that can help us rethink ordinary ethnographic methods and representations. Being more critical and creative about how we engage migrants in our work should help us take into consideration a more multifaceted picture of people's experiences and encourage a more collaborative process of knowledge making and framing.

5) **Adele De Stefani** (Bergamo University), ***Beyond Producing "Them" and "Us": An Ethnographic Analysis of Institutional Discourses and Practices in Bologna, Italy***

Based on three months of ethnographic research spent at the offices of the Bologna municipality's Services for Social Inclusion, and through in-depth interviews with key informants including about twenty Italian services providers and migrants, the paper sets out to problematize how institutional discourses and practices turn migrants into "others". Focusing on an Italian project that aims to promote the social inclusion of refugees, as well as a change to the existing emergency paradigm that has characterized Italian immigration policies, the analysis explores the identity categories currently developed by social services that attend to the needs of refugees. Furthermore, it examines the effects of the process of the institutional "otherness production" on the lives of long-term migrants residing in Italy. With the help of the observation and investigation of everyday practices and discourses, the analysis illustrates the existence of complex horizons of reciprocal collocation that challenge the mono-directional construction of boundaries between "them" and "us".

6) **Olimpia Dragouni** (Humboldt University), ***The Disaster Discourse of the Colonized: East European Islamophobia as Self-Defining Opportunity in Poland***

Since 2014 Polish public discourse (daily press, TV programs, internet forums, speeches by politicians) has refused to welcome refugees and migrants from the Middle East. The lack of empathy and rhetoric borrowed from fascism has astonished those who remember Poles as nation of immigrants, refugees, and Nazi victims. The paper offers possible explanations for this paradox, arguing that the Islamophobic disaster discourse is an expression of the doxa of the colonized. Applying Bourdieu's notion of doxa, understood as society's taken-for-granted, unquestioned truths and common beliefs derived from socialization, the paper will show Poland as a mentally colonized space, which longs to be confronted with Islam as civilizational enemy, and hence, positioning itself in the imaginary realm of the "West". Moreover, the refugees pose an "existential" threat to Poles who have long provided the cheap labour for neighbouring rich countries of EU. Analyzing the effects of mental

colonization, and the efforts to protect vital material resources, will provide new insights into the Islamophobic attitudes that have become prevalent in Polish society. We need to regard the disaster discourse as both a result of, and opportunity for, reinterpretation of the division between "us" and "them".