

1) Reframing Centuries of Forced Cham Displacement

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4) The proposed project panel the Cham experience in Vietnam, Malaysia and China PRC in historical and political perspective, so as to understand the differential factors governing host states' responses to refugee flows.

Dominant state discourses in Southeast Asia tend either to erase or downplay religious and ethnic differences, to frame them as 'Other', or essentialise them as apolitical folk spectacles. This is particularly true of the Cham people, a diverse group of seafaring, Muslim communities living on and around the South China Sea, who have been subjected to centuries of forced displacement. These papers investigate the dominant understandings of Cham ethnicity, forced displacement, history and culture as part of a wider study into Cham self-identification and official representations in Vietnamese, Malaysian and Chinese museums funded by the UK research councils AHRC and ESRC.

The concept of refugee only makes sense within the contemporary political narrative of sovereign nation-states. Crucially, this enables refugee 'crises' to be firmly defined as primarily political and not humanitarian; as a product of bordered imaginings rather than natural disasters. This paper critically analyses how official discourse and ethnic categorization essentialise the place of Cham within the nation-state and looks to Cham people's own self-identification for more cosmopolitan identity narratives that step outside the nation-state frame.

The ethnonym Cham provides only a semblance of unity to very diverse experiences, which offer insights into the long-term and differential impact of historical circumstances and host country - among other factors - on forced displacement. Today, Cham are officially recognized as one of Vietnam's and China's ethnic groups, but remain economically and culturally marginalized compared to the dominant Kinh (ethnic Vietnamese) and Han Chinese (dominant Chinese). Comparing their fate with that of Cham refugees to Malaysia is instructive, since Cham refugees from the Khmer Rouge assimilated relatively easily as Muslims with Malay characteristics (Taylor 2007). These varied and repeated experiences of forced displacement across the South China Sea make the Cham a rich subject for study, whilst their status as a Muslim minority enables comparison with integration and intercultural dialogue in a wider context, including the United Kingdom. This is important in the context of racialised tensions following the UK's recent vote to leave the European Union.

5) Discussant: TBC