



Balkan immigrants in eastern Thrace, 1938 (L'Immigration en Turquie, La Turquie Kemaliste, 1938, p. 16).

### **International Symposium «The Making of Identity through Rural Space: Scenarios, Experiences and Contestations in the Rural Built Environment»**

Organizers: Vera Egbers, Özge Sezer, DFG Research Training Group 1913 «Cultural and Technological Significance of Historic Buildings» (Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg; Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner; Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

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The historical role played by nature as a non-human actor has recently been discussed by environmental historians in connection with society, politics, economy, and space. Accordingly, nature is conceptualized as «a point of everyday encounter in which social actors such as the representatives of state bodies, individuals, and groups interact, struggle, and negotiate.»<sup>1</sup> In a parallel vein, rural space is produced as an outcome of the struggle and negotiation about nature. Within this background, the symposium organized by Vera Egbers and Özge Sezer focused on the production of rural space through an inquiry of the role of social conflicts and power hierarchies, the agents involved, the material outcomes such as the built environment, and the related potential spatial conflicts. The «identity formation processes» and «contested spaces» as their outcome constituted the main framework.

The symposium started on 28 October with a keynote lecture by LIESBETH VAN DE GRIFT (Utrecht) entitled «Reconfiguring Rural Spaces, Remaking Rural Communities.» In her talk, Prof. Dr. van de Grift highlighted a hydrological project in the Netherlands. The project which was an attempt to build new communities on unoccupied land through reclamation represented the 1930s utopia in which the fascist governments saw a political purpose, a strong belief in mastering nature and the perfectibility of society. As Prof. van de Grift interpreted, cultivating implied a right to land and it was a peaceful, benign way of conquering it. As these examples of internal colonization had national and ideological purposes, rural communities in new lands were utilized to develop characteristics of the Dutch nation, and agriculture was the cornerstone of those societies. It can be considered a kind of national defense project as conquering these lands becomes more difficult if they are inhabited by people of your own ethnic and national background, as Prof. van de Grift elaborated. The process additionally involved technical and social experts in governance. Since a qualified community needed to emerge, spatial and social planners chose pioneer participants who would live there and were selected from forward-looking modern farmers with the best education.

At this point, she also underlined the changes in the perspective of research on land reclamation as not only a part of different political structures but also an important developing matter for rural actors. People did more research on questions such as: What were farmers doing, what were they growing? Related to that, the issue of self-conceptualization of the settlers, such as what they do and do not agree with, was also an important question.

Then Prof. van de Grift carried the discussion to a further, global context: The 1960s witnessed a shift from the drainage paradigm to an overriding focus on productivity and to the appreciation of other aspects such as landscape aesthetics, biodiversity, degrowth, and more participatory modes of governance. In the 1970s these different concerns seemed to be connected. Productive, organized, technocratic governments implemented big infrastructural reclamation projects. Prof. van de Grift outlined in the discussions that agriculture is not just about producing agrarian goods, but also about people as stakeholders living in these areas. She emphasized that agriculture has also emerged as a tool for the representation of people, in other words, for the claims on legitimation of people's lives in the rural areas. This approach reflected on current organizations like Natura 2000, «a network of core breeding and resting sites for rare and threatened species, and some rare natural habitat types which are protected in their own right. It stretches across all 27 EU countries, both on land and at sea.»<sup>2</sup> That is to

say, the implementations of these policies gave rise to new conflicts between local farmers and tourism entrepreneurs. But a certain master narrative also changed. The political history of the 20th century of Europe has witnessed a shift from urban centers to rural spaces, and a history of politics to the history of the political ideas, actors, practices, technologies of governance, and interplay, including materiality and spatial as well as environmental dimensions. The first day of the symposium ended with Prof. Dr. van de Grift closing the debate by pointing to questions regarding the conflicts over land use in the face of biodiversity loss and climate change, marginalization and shrinkage of rural regions, and the rise of political extremism.

The second day of the symposium consisted of morning and afternoon sessions with seven presentations and concluded with a closing keynote. The morning session started with the talk of PAOLO GRUPPUSO (Aberdeen) focusing on Agro Pontino as *loci* of contestations where politics and identity materialize the challenge between predetermined categories such as rural and urban. Dr. Gruppuso began by outlining the transformation of the Pontine Marshes by the fascist government in Italy in the 1930s as an area which also soon became the flat land to be cultivated and transformed into a solid surface to build cities. As an example of this implementation Littoria (Latina after World War II) was founded in 1932 as a service center for the new rural community brought from Northern Italy by the fascist regime. Littoria suddenly changed identity and became the most iconic of the fascist new towns thus unveiling an «urban» contradiction into the hegemonic image of the reclamation, propagandized as a process of ruralization.

Dr. Gruppuso discussed this mass intervention through social engineering, implementation of highly sophisticated systems, environmental policies, and idealization of ruralization by the fascist regime, which was completely different from a rural with a particular economy of hunting, fishing, and gathering with its complex nature. Another important point was the conflicts which continuously occurred between locals and settlers, an example of which would be the identity-making process and how Agro Pontino can be considered a contested space: Agro Pontino has turned into a highly urbanized region, thus losing many of its original rural traits. However, water infrastructures and historic buildings still characterize this particular landscape, testifying to its recent and longer history, and to its ambiguous identity. Dr. Gruppuso concluded the discussion by highlighting that the fascist dream of rationalizing the rural and seeking an identity through this sort of intervention caused a lack of a common and shared identity.

In the second paper of the day, CRISTINA PALLINI (Milano) and ALEKSA KOROLIJA (Milano) began their talk by presenting their EU-funded project *MODSCAPES: Modernist Reinventions of the Rural Landscape*, which focused on the «rural landscapes produced by large-scale agricultural development and colonisation schemes planned in the twentieth century throughout Europe and beyond.»<sup>3</sup> They presented two case studies of reclamation and colonization from current-day Italy and Greece: Agro Pontino and Giannitsa, settlements which were located on Via Egnatia, the ancient Roman road connecting Rome and Constantinople. «Technical Landscape» was utilized as a conceptual framework for indicating a «subway-system-like» network through the water channels as in the case of Agro Pontino. During the Nazi invasions in 1942, the Pontine Marshes were utilized by reverting the pumping of water and flooding the land, thus making it impossible to cross: A significant example of the integration of nature and machines resulting in the transformation of the site into a weapon of warfare. The machines became subjects in the reclamation epics and reality.

The establishment of new settlements was another issue that the presenters focused on. The refugee village in Chalkidiki, which was entirely built by the company DHTG as contractor, was important in that regard. The repetition of the same house settlement in the reclaimed area provided standardization, cost efficiency, and mass production. Higher level services as well as the topography and the road system were also an issue. Engineers seemed not enough but artists were asked to decide the shape. Pallini and Korolija also gave some examples about settlements built in Libya and Portugal with similar motives. In the final part of the presentation, two examples of Pontina and Giannitsa were compared in technical details as well as the details in social structures. Prof. Pallini and Dr. Korolija demonstrated similar problems between two implementations that the settlers had to inherit, such as the construction process, ownership, and management of agricultural life.

The third talk of the day was also a joint paper contributed by IAN KUIJT (Indiana ND) and AYŞE BURSALI (Indiana ND). In the first part, Prof. Ian Kuijt started with a brief outline of the project regarding landscapes of memory and human connection with land and place, shifting identity politics of people within rural settings, and reconfiguration of small-scale farming and the value of the rural. He explained their perspective as a comparative approach through transportable themes, inquiring how the ethnographic and local levels in rural could be used and if it is possible to learn from the individual: What are the commonalities and differences? What is the human face of the reorganization or abandonment of the rural?

How does this process of rural transform the thinking of the voices on the farm? He finally gave the examples of the documentaries they produced on different case studies from different parts of the world where they questioned the human cost of these processes and heard the human voices, what this means traditionally and what is going on globally and what is rural in people's minds.

Ayşe Bursalı, in the second part of the presentation, focused on Kızılkaya village in Aksaray in central Turkey, which was once a bedrock village with cave houses within the Cappadocian landscape, a palimpsest of earlier civilizations, continuous abandonment, and resettling. She explained that after a natural disaster hit the village in 1963, the villagers had to leave Kızılkaya and move to a new settlement with 50 newly-constructed one-storey houses. The residents themselves transformed these new homes, particularly with the re-use of building elements from their old houses, or sometimes with the implementation of a similar spatial organization such as outhouses or adding new floors over time. Bursalı demonstrated how the leftover ruins, however, became a site of memory, both for the villagers as well as through popular culture as a movie site. In summary, the village identity of Kızılkaya went through three phases: relocation, transformation of the old village, and the impact of the migrant workers. Bursalı outlined the ways in which the villagers were materializing connections between identity and space, utilizing different strategies.

The next speaker, AYŞEGÜL DİNÇÇAĞ (Berlin), questioned the conscious process of remaking identity by the return of second-generation Greeks to Imbros. Dinççağ began her talk by a brief outlining of Imbros, an island of Turkey in the North Aegean which was a topic of dispute between Turkey and Greece not only due to its strategic importance but also due to the exceptional position of its minority population after the Lausanne Treaty until the early 2000s. It was due to this conflict that most of the Imbrian Greeks left the island throughout the 20th century. What Dinççağ focused on in her presentation was the occasional return of the second generation to the island and their museumification of their own homes, their grief for the lost home and their search for locality through making a new Imbrian community.

In her research, Dinççağ investigated tangible and intangible aspects of the identity formation process through cultural gatherings and festivals to the material and spatial culture which overall were part of the curated nostalgia. In the case of Imbros, nostalgia was not only retrospective but also prospective. Considering future nostalgia and longing, it was instrumental in the construction of the present and future. As an example, the owners not only preserved but also deliberately collected

the items they searched, found, sorted, and exhibited in the house. Here, the act of collecting unfolds a turn: The protection exposes a fear of loss. The worry of «everything will be lost» reveals a strong correlational tension which transforms into a sense of loss and desire. She concluded her presentation (and the morning session) by showing the contestations in the rural landscape of the island, highlighting the differences between spaces such as inside and outside the houses, public buildings, other settlements etc. and their specific utilizations.

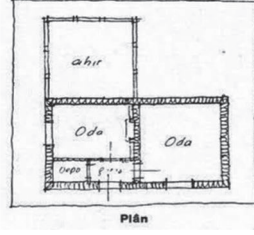
Discussions were continued in the afternoon by OLUWAMAYOWA WILLOUGHBY (New York). Her presentation was grounded on a narration derived from her personal experiences in Turkey and extended through her anthropological survey in Tulum village in Izmir. She started her talk by describing her encounters as an African-American woman in Turkey. Her story began in Istanbul where she attended language courses. Everyday interaction with locals in this urban context led her first to question the place of «Blackness» in Turkey within the formation of the nation-state and its problematic definition in demographic terms; then to articulate her research approach which looks back to the past through the lenses of contemporary facts. She emphasized the complexity (and dilemma) of self-definition for people of African descent in Turkey because of the neglect in the nation-building scheme that reflects on today's societal domain.

Willoughby continued with presenting a short historical background of African descendants coming from North and East Africa (especially) to western Anatolia as laborers after the prohibition of the enslavement trade in the Ottoman territories in the late 19th century. From this point of view, the speaker pointed out the parallels in «laborability» between African descendants in America and in the Middle East. She, however, indicated that differences in sociological levels disclosed another layer of African studies demonstrating how subjectification played a role in the case of Turkey. Here Willoughby included her survey in Tulum village where she closely encountered a 91-year-old African-Turkish woman. The village's establishment was directly initiated by Sultan Abdülhamid II, and people of African origin were settled to labor in the Sultan's properties in the region. Willoughby introduced her close conversation as a result of living together with the villager and described her observation on how subjectification occurred in the rural context, and how it became rather more obscure than in urban context. She exemplified her investigation with the adaptation capabilities of an old villager as an African-Turkish woman enhancing the «given» environment as if it was her «originated» space. Willoughby concluded her discussion by pointing out this multilayered character of the case in making of identity.





İskân umum müdürlüğü tipine göre inşa edilen bir ev



The village house, implemented by the Housing Department of Interior Ministry of Turkey in the 1930s (Behçet Ünsal, 'Sincan Köyü Planı', *Arkitekt*, 109–110.1–2, 1940, p. 16).



Yeniköy Village, Torbali, Izmir (Cumhuriyetin 15inci Yılında İzmir, İzmir: C.H.P. Basımevi, 1938, p. 136).

After Willoughby's presentation, the organizers of the symposium, ÖZGE SEZER (Cottbus) and VERA EGBERS (Cottbus) started their talk by pointing out their research subject in which they focus on modernization and nationalization attempts and their spatial translations in rural Turkey. They look at Yeniköy village in western Turkey as an observation medium to understand how the rural communities were designated by the imperial Ottoman state in the late 19th century and by the republican nation-state in the 1920s and 1930s. First, Dr. Sezer gave a geographic, demographic, and historical overview of Yeniköy village and also presented a historiography of the region. She explained the motives with which the first settlement in Yeniköy was established under the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1891, and how the second settlement was built during the early republican period in 1936. She presented the architectural principles of the two settlements which do not resemble each other, however, they derived from similar motives of states' initiations of attributing «identity» to the people in rural space.

In order to turn to the other end of the spectrum – the subjects that were actually living in or moved to the designated areas – Dr. Vera Egbers explained the theoretical background of their approach to Yeniköy that made the place a spatial palimpsest. Here Dr. Egbers introduced the concept of *Thirdspace* which is rooted in postcolonial thinking that includes the sphere of failure and the non-verbal influence of less powerful people, leading to a better understanding of contested spaces in rural Turkey. By highlighting this concept, she offered a reading on settler experiences in the given space and continued with the interpretations on the place-making procedures in both settlements in Yeniköy. Then the researchers completed their presentation by demonstrating today's condition of the village including the monumental, public, and private spaces as designated places, and their usage capacities nowadays. By doing so, they illustrated their approach touching upon how contestation occurred in rural space.

As the third talk of the afternoon session, EVA MARIA FROSCHAUER (Berlin) began her presentation by underlining her source of inspiration of the concept «memory of houses» from a theater play, performed in 2019, titled «*Verkaufte Heimat*». The script was written by Felix Mitterer. The play outlined the history of the Tyroleans who were forced to resettle in Telfs, after casting their vote on the «option» of the German Reich in 1939. Concerning this resettlement of the Tyroleans, Prof. Froschauer focused on the settlements constructed for the «homecoming» and the recent replacement of those houses with newer buildings which resulted in the erasure of the contested memory of the original settlement. She outlined the process as an «attempt to produce a homeland in times of *Völkisch* and transnational thinking.» The houses were planned in a uniform manner with typical floor plans, standardized elements, and a unified appearance of the settlements. They were constructed through forced labor by the Nazi government. But on the other hand, they aimed to be a «social housing» in closed picturesque assemblages.

In the last part of the talk, Prof. Froschauer focused on Zams in North Tyrol where the settlement designed by Helmut Erdle with a landscape plan by Herta Hammerbacher was constructed in 1941. Recently, the houses were gradually replaced by new buildings, a few houses remained typical village houses. She underlined that the context and the idea of an architecture that belongs to its landscape has disappeared. Since 2009, *Neue Heimat Tirol* – a non-profit housing association – established the new settlement consisting of new housing complexes at the site. Prof. Froschauer argued that a coinciding history disappeared with the new planning strategies of NHT and she demonstrated another contestation in rural space which consists of rewriting a new cultural history.

The symposium ended on 29 October with the closing keynote by HOLLYAMBER KENNEDY (Zurich). In her talk Dr. Kennedy addressed themes raised during the symposium and covered all the topics opened for discussion in the presentations. She redefined the concept of internal colonization in the frame of colonial studies pointing its realization as spatialization of infrastructures and mass circulation of people related to the hegemonial aspects of the states. Within the context of internal colonization, specifically, rural modernization – inseparable from «modernization» – developed with marginalized processes in territorial, demographic, political, and economic courses. As Dr. Kennedy summarized, the motives causing the rural modernization were accompanied with an increase of spatial knowledge, territorialization and de-territorialization as a response, and using technical innovation as a common policy for the legitimation of states' powers in the rural space. From the late 19th century, she added, land reclamation as the most prevalent implementation of rural modernization became a transnational planning method serving the states' attempts of place-making related to the challenging movements of people such as forced migration, population exchanges, displacement, and emplacement of the masses.

Dr. Kennedy elaborated how rural space indeed became a contested space. From the 19th century redefinition of the states' lands and territorial idealization went hand in hand with consolidating the sovereignty

and nation-building. Moreover, the rural crisis resulted in a migration of skilled peasants to the urban domain and the depletion of the rural domain. Alongside the historical entanglements, the states sought to establish new techniques to utilize the rural land as «imagined» territory maintaining an agrarian lifestyle as a way of economic and cultural enhancement, hence national regeneration. In this regard, architectural planning played a crucial role to rationalize the state power. Dr. Kennedy linked these operations occurring in rural space with the colonial context in comprehending them as a form of settler colonialism that explicitly framed rural people as subaltern. As significant examples of these attempts, Dr. Kennedy presented imperial Germany and Italy in the 19th century toward the first half of 20th century. She introduced reforms in the state structure such as the establishment of a ministry of agriculture that dealt with the stabilization of the countryside. In addition to this, the emancipation of slavery generated free labor for the large-scale operations with which states attempted to re-form the countryside with technical (using architectural planning and construction) and cultural (using social and demographic engineering) tools.

Dr. Kennedy highlighted «domesticity» as a colonial notion which also occurred in place-making processes in the countryside on behalf of the regimes. She demonstrated implementations of architectural planning in German colonies in South-West Africa carrying a similar



Yeniköy village, photographed by Özge Sezer, 2013.

language with the model villages built alongside the eastern border of Prussian Germany as a political strategy against Polish invasions. The parallels between «colonial architecture» and invented «rural architecture» signified the building styles and techniques as the medium in grappling identity-making procedures. Moreover, Dr. Kennedy elaborated on the notion of domesticity as a renversé fact: From the last decades of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, Germanization attempts of eastern borders were operated as extensive modernization projects executed by a wide range of technical experts. The territory was expropriated and provided to «ethnically Germans» to settle where the Polish and Jews lived before. Rural populations who had to encounter forced migration remained as seasonal agricultural laborers, similar to «migrant workers». As Dr. Kennedy expressed, this resulted in «mobile domesticity» which epitomizes the contestation in rural space. She presented a historical documentation of a Polish family

who were forced to migrate from their properties after the Germanization policies in their land. They started to live in a camper working as mobile agricultural laborers and peasants refusing to be housed in a permanent settlement. Dr. Kennedy underlined this resistance as a daily protest. This «demonstration» of the Polish family became an icon of endurance against forced displacement and emplacement. After this narration, Dr. Kennedy concluded her talk by emphasizing how conflicts occur between policy makers and rural people, and how it reflects on the rural environment.

This closing remark opened up the final discussion about how bodily experience is relevant to set the frame and scope of rural space; how disobedience forms «modernization» in the rural context; and what we can learn from the margins of architecture when it turns into an instrument of rough identity-making strategies.

- 1 Akpınar, Ö. (2020) Reclaiming the Empire: Environment, Marshes, and Hydraulic Engineering in the Late Ottoman Period, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Boğaziçi University, p.14.
- 2 [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm)
- 3 <https://heranet.info/projects/hera-2016-uses-of-the-past/modernist-reinventions-of-the-rural-landscapes/>.

## Conference Overview

Thursday, 28 October 2021

### KEYNOTE LECTURE

Prof. Dr. Liesbeth van de Grift, Utrecht University  
Reconfiguring Rural Spaces, Remaking Rural Communities

Ayşegül Dinççağ, TU Berlin

The «Müze Ev» of Imbros: Heritage Practices of Homecomers

Oluwamayowa Willoughby, Cornell University  
Rural Places, Rural Faces

Friday, 29 October 2021

Dr. Paolo Gruppuso, University of Aberdeen  
The Making and Unmaking of an Ambiguous Identity:  
The Reclamation District of Agro Pontino, Italy

Dr. Vera Egbers, Dr. Özge Sezer, BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg  
Identity Policies in a Nutshell: Yeniköy Village as a Palimpsest of Contested Spaces in Turkey

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cristina Pallini, Dr. Aleksa Korolija, Politecnico di Milano  
Landscape Takes Command

Prof. Dr. Eva Maria Froschauer, Berliner Hochschule für Technik  
Memory of Houses: Transformation of Identity in both Tyrols 1939/2019

Ayşe Bursalı, Prof. Dr. Ian Kuijt, University of Notre Dame  
From Homes to Ruins to Movie Sets: Negotiating Identity through Resettlement and Architectural Change in a Turkish Village

### KEYNOTE LECTURE

Dr. Hollyamber Kennedy, ETH Zurich  
Wastelands of Empire: Reclamation and The Rural as Agent and Medium