Tracing memories in border-space
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How do asylum-seekers experience the time-space in which they are received in The Netherlands?
Focus on space, time and the body: *rhythm, memory, identity*
Internalizing border-space
Extended asylum procedure
“[T]he effects of the persecution and the circumstances of the departure means that there is a risk that there will be only one form of evidence to support the asylum seekers’ claim: their word, and their word alone”.

Ricoeur P, 2010: Being a Stranger *in: Theory, Culture & Society* 27(5) pg. 45
Jones & Garde Hansen (2012) imagine autobiographical memory as living matter, arranged in a complex labyrinthine landscape (Jones & Garde Hansen, 2012: 13)

Jones O & Garde-Hansen J, 2012, Geography and memory: Explorations in Identity, Place and Becoming, Palgrave Macmillan
A recollection is a temporary construction, that integrates past experiences into a current image of the self. Memories, Conway argues, “may be altered, distorted, even fabricated” in order to support a coherent autobiographical narrative” (Conway, 2005: 595).

“[Memories] are not static information, but are reworked in the light of current practice, and at the same time shape that practice” (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012: 161).

Conway M, 2005: Memory and the self, in: Journal of Memory and Language, 53, 594-628
Jones O and Garde-Hansen J (ed), 2012: Geography and Memory, explorations in identity, place and becoming, palgrave macmillan memory studies, Basingstoke
Identities rely both on the temporality and on the spatiality of autobiographical memories. “[M]emories of who we are now, who we were, who we wanted to become, are wrapped up in memories of where we are now, where we were, and where we will be [would like to be]” (Jones & Garde-Hansen, 2012: 4)

Jones O & Garde-Hansen J, 2012, Geography and memory: Explorations in Identity, Place and Becoming, Palgrave Macmillan
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

The symptoms of this disorder are divided in three main categories: reliving traumatic experiences; avoiding situations that may remind of the traumatic event; being highly alert and easily aroused. Rubin, Dennis and Beckham (2011) assert that traumatic memories of PTSD in many ways resemble general autobiographical memories. However, traumatic memories tend “to be recalled with more emotional intensity, recalled more frequently, and to be judged more central to the [victim’s] life-story” (Rubin, Dennis and Beckham, 2011: 854).

Therapeutic environment, client is enabled to:
- negotiate the limits to which a client will voice his or her experiences
- Control the wording of his or her experiences
- integrate the “physical and mental, outer and inner, rational and emotional, [fantasized and real]” aspects of his or her experiences (Bondi, 2003: 543)
- share his or her experiences with an open mind
- control the “[b]oundaries of confidentiality
- control the pace and space in which s/he comes to terms with his or her experiences


Bondi L, 2005: Working the Spaces of Neoliberal Subjectivity: Psychotherapeutic Technologies, Professionalisation and Counselling, in: Antipode, ... 497-514
Asylum seekers carry an increased risk of being diagnosed with PTSD, probably “as a result of past violence, bereavement and dislocation” (Herlihy & Turner, 2007: 268).

Herlihy & Turner assert that the chance of being granted asylum is mainly based on the asylum seeker’s ability “to recount a coherent narrative, describing past experiences of past persecution, which fit the definition of the Geneva Convention [...]. However, for many, neither remembering nor relating some of the most horrific experiences of their lives is easy” (Herlihy & Turner, 2007: 268).

What is the impact of tracing intense emotional memories on the identities of asylum seekers?
Case-study; participatieve observatie in een Asielzoekers Centrum (AZC)
- onderzoeksdagboek
- etnografische schetsen
“To be a participant in ‘a culture’ implies an immersion of the researcher’s self into the everyday rhythms and routines of the community, a development of relationships with people who can show and tell the researcher what is ‘going on’ there and, through this, an experience of a whole range of relationships and emotional states that such a process must inevitably involve”.

**Meeting 2:**

Laurent (*fictitious name*) shows me a letter from the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS). His asylum request is denied. “What are the reasons?”, Laurent asks me. I read the decision. In his second asylum request, Laurent put forward a letter from the governor of the province in [D] and a statement from his psychologist. The governor describes the riots that caused the death of his father. The psychologist confirms that Laurent is diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Despite all this, the INS states that there are no new facts and circumstances in his case that would make them review their earlier negative decision. Laurent rises. He pulls up his jersey and show me a scar on his stomach. “My intestines are ruined”, he says, “I drank the poisoned water that was meant for my father”. He moves vehemently and seems to point at his native country. Then he shrinks and points with two hands to his chest. “I am victim”, he says. “The INS isn’t interested in my health problemens. They just follow the rules”.

Meeting 3:

Laurent (fictitious name) shows me a letter. It’s an invitation for a meeting with the Aliens Police. “I’m afraid of the police”, Laurent says. He rises and pulls up his jersey, showing the scar on his stomach, close to his belly button. In [D] he saw with his own eyes how a man got stabbed in his upper arm, Laurent tells me, while swinging his right hand to his left arm. “Just go there and tell the policeman what you just told me, so he knows that you are afraid of him”, I tell him. “You don’t have to worry so much here. It’s the judge who decides”.

Meeting 8:

In a letter to court, Laurent’s lawyer demands that his application of the provisional appeal will be treated soon. The Service of Repatriation & Departure made contact with the embassy of Laurent’s native country. Now that the embassy has provided him with a laissez passer, Laurent not only risks to be evicted from the centre, but also to be repatriated. The lawyer points the judge at the traumatic experiences, Laurent has gone through in [D]. [...] “You have a good lawyer”, I tell him. “Yes”, he replies, “He is God-given”. My previous lawyer putted my file in a heap. “It will be allright”, Laurent says, “I put my trust in God” (excerpts from research diary).
Internalize  Rule out  Seek refuge  Sacrifice  Relive  Erupt
Rule out:
Laurent’s struggle for the acknowledgment of his need of protection is fought by means of legal statements and counter-statements. The words, that these statements are made of show few traces of Laurent’s own embodied experiences. He is confronted with a standardized and normative symbolic order, “where symbols have been detached from affect, where the meaning of words has been detached from the meaning of life, from what matters”.

What matters for Laurent is his trauma. The scar on his stomach symbolizes the loss of his father. Yet, the trauma, that underlies the scar, cannot really be represented in the symbolic order of legal statements. All Laurent can do is point towards the sources of his grieve; far away in his native country, and deep in his own body. While trying to signify these sources, Laurent gets stuck. His passionate gestures speak of his trauma. Yet, he is unable to word these gestures.
McKinney (2007) states that a trauma story alone cannot reflect the past experiences that constitute a trauma. She argues that only by carefully witnessing a victim’s non-verbal language, the significance of the victim’s words may be grasped. However, the current procedure fails to witness an asylum seeker’s non-verbal language. While constructing and contesting legal statements, concerning Laurent’s identity in border-space, his embodied experiences remain unnoticed.

Relive:

While Laurent’s confrontations with the Aliens Police incite vivid recollections of traumatic experiences in his native country, his meetings with the Service of Repatriation & Departure bear the threat of being forced to return to his country. Instead of a therapeutic environment, the ASRC arouses feelings of anxiety and fear that undermine his sense of belonging. He is captured in-between the traumatic experiences that he went through in his country of origin, and the ever looming revival of these experiences at the ASCR.