

A Writeshop on Displacement Economies in African Contexts

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Former NAI researcher, Dr Amanda Hammar, now based at the Centre of African Studies, Copenhagen University, recently convened a 'writeshop' at NAI, aimed at producing an edited volume in the Zed Press/NAI 'Africa Now' series, entitled *Displacement Economies: Paradoxes of Crisis and Creativity in African Contexts*. This writing project consolidates, while also extends conceptually and geographically, the four-year long research programme Dr Hammar coordinated at NAI on 'Political Economies of Displacement in Southern Africa' between 2006 and 2010. With the very able administrative assistance provided by Sofia Widforss at NAI, and despite the threatened disruptions of Iceland's volcanic ash clouds, the writeshop managed to draw together an invited group of international scholars based in Scandinavia, central Europe, Britain and the USA. In combination, they work in diverse empirical settings across the continent, come from different academic disciplines and make use of varied theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of crisis and displacement and its multi-layered effects. Nonetheless, there were a number of intellectual-political threads that linked them all.

The research presented included studies on: the new cocaine economy being generated through and within Guinea Bissau (Henrik Vigh, Denmark); the challenges of entrepreneurship amongst formerly conflict-displaced returnees in Casamance (Martin Evans, Britain); spontaneous markets emerging within the crisis zones of the Darfur-Chad border (Andrea Behrends, Germany); the 'prison economy' of the IDP camps (Morten Boal, Norway) alongside the distortions of humanitarian aid and militarised 'development' (Sverker Finnstrom, Sweden) in Northern Uganda; the economic opportunities and investments generated by the Somaliland diaspora, both outside and inside the country (Peter Hansen, Denmark); the emergence of new economic logics and forms of livelihood amongst young township men in urban Zimbabwe (Jeremy Jones, USA); the paradoxes of class formation and accumulation under conditions of sustained crisis and displacement in Zimbabwe (Amanda Hammar, Denmark); the dynamics and implications of 'planned dispossession' associated with corporate mining projects in different parts of Africa (Graeme Rodgers, USA); and the generation and/or new uses of often hidden 'transnational financial structures' under conditions of crisis (Sarah Bracking, Britain). Invited discussants on the papers included four scholars active in various related fields: Mirjam de Bruijn (African Studies Centre, Leiden University), Wolfgang Zeller (Centre of African Studies, Edinburgh University), and Mats Utas and Ilda Lorencó-Lindell (both from NAI). Several others unable to attend the workshop will contribute to the edited volume.

Despite research undertaken within such varied contexts, the workshop strove to discover if there was a set of common-enough dynamics at play – related to conditions of crisis and displacement especially over a longer-term period – that might be captured within the still exploratory conceptual framework of 'displacement economies'. Many intellectual challenges remain in such a collaborative process, not least the work of refining definitions for critical terms (such as 'displacement' itself, and how this is distinct from yet connected to notions of migration and mobility). However, there were indeed a number of dimensions and themes that emerged as connecting the work and which appear to be key to addressing questions about the relationship between conditions of crisis and displacement and the multiple economies – and political economies – (as well as changing social and political relations) that both generate and get reshaped by such conditions. The paradox of impossibility and opportunity, of dispossession and wealth, of destruction and creativity, of disorder and order being simultaneously present in such

contexts are amongst these. So too is the juxtaposition of rupture and chronicity, distance and proximity, nothingness and hope. Other interconnecting questions concern the experience of changing temporalities wherein, for example, 'the future' unpredictably opens and closes; institutional fragmentation whereby sovereignties multiply and change face without warning; and social and political disruptions where the once seemingly ordinary work of being and becoming is turned upside down by changing boundaries of citizenship and belonging. The edited book that will emerge from this workshop will undoubtedly provide a rich resource in terms of empirically grounded and theoretically rigorous insights into all these dimensions and themes, which will in turn hopefully assist others in exploring and explaining displacement economies wherever they emerge.

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