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Social and cultural anthropology
Standard level
Paper 1

Thursday 28 April 2022 (afternoon)

1 hour

Instructions to candidates

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage and answer questions 1 **and** 2. Answer **either** question 3 **or** 4.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[20 marks]**.

Read the passage.

Passage adapted from Gold, M., 2019. Liminality and the asylum process in Switzerland. *Anthropology Today*, 35, pp. 16–19.

I conducted ethnographic research in a government refugee processing centre in Zurich, Switzerland, which aims to integrate refugees into Swiss life. I also conducted interviews with employees in international NGOs (non-governmental organizations), such as the Red Cross and Amnesty International, and in international organizations, such as the World Health
5 Organization. Additionally, I consulted official statistics, publications and regulations.

Asylum seekers leave their homes in response to crisis and war, the roots of which involve Europe. When they tell me their stories, they stress that leaving their homes was the last thing they wanted. Few were prepared for the hardships involved in the asylum procedure.

“I thought, once I got to Switzerland, I would join my fiancée in Geneva, but this has been the
10 hardest part of the journey. I have to settle here instead. I don’t know when this process will end, and I have no control over my own future. I feel I have to constantly explain that I am not a thief,” a young Syrian man explained to me while we were chatting and having a coffee in the processing centre.

15 Today, asylum seekers remain in legal and political limbo for many years. They remain liminal to the state. Even if they are recognized as a “refugee”, they do not automatically become a citizen.

Liminality, as V. Turner understood it, is a space of transition in ritual from one status or stage of life to another. The liminal state is characterized by violence, humiliation and reconfiguration within a process. The ritual provides resolution of a moment of crisis in a person’s life. However, in the context of my fieldwork, people become caught in a prolonged state of “in-betweenness”.

20 Through the long and difficult legal and bureaucratic procedures that turn asylum seekers into refugees, the nation-state reinforces its social boundaries and identity by determining its “others”.

The procedures at the processing centre segregate and classify people: families are separated and those whose claims are rejected are sent back. A key concern of the process is to separate “victims” (refugees) from “opportunists” (economic migrants). The transformation of the asylum
25 seeker (a potentially dangerous economic migrant) into a refugee (a humble and morally deserving victim) involves a reconfiguration of personhood.

People can stay a maximum of three months in the processing centres while their legal status is determined. During this time, they are stripped of any form of recognition and sense of self. Multiple forms of degradation include the lack of recognition of people’s social class, educational
30 level or professional degrees, and religious and ethnic belonging by grouping them together indistinctly. Asylum seekers are expected to be submissive and thankful for what they receive (shelter, language courses, support) and they must obey instructions. They are treated as a homogeneous mass.

Life at the processing centre is focused on bureaucratic processes, during which people must
35 prove their worth. They must endure hostile interviews and daily routines. They are assigned jobs at the centre (eg cleaning) or other undesirable jobs (eg clearing forests or working on farms) that enable them to demonstrate their moral value. If they do not fulfil their obligations, they risk being expelled. However, most of the day is spent waiting: for interview results, papers to arrive, and news.

40 Those who are accepted as refugees go through social integration programmes, which they consider one of the most difficult stages, as they have to deal with their Swiss hosts in everyday situations and behave as submissive and humble guests. It is especially hard to get employment, rent an apartment and build a supportive network.

45 Refugees, in their liminality, become buffers of hierarchical categorizations: European worker/non-European economic migrants, European Union/non-European Union citizens, Christian/Muslim.

50 Host societies act upon asylum seekers by determining the boundaries of their acceptance into society. Through processes of humiliation and eroding differences, host nations attempt to reclaim the sovereignty of the nation-state based on essentialized views of community defined by ethnicity rather than by territory.

Answer question 1 **and** question 2.

1. Define the term **ethnocentrism** and describe how it is understood and applied in the context of the passage. [4]
2. Analyse the ethnographic data presented in the passage using the concept of **identity**. [6]

Answer **either** question 3 **or** question 4.

3. Compare and contrast the ways in which the key concept of **change** or **symbolism** is evident in this passage with how it is evident in **one** other ethnographic example you have studied. [10]

OR

4. Compare and contrast the approaches to research adopted by the anthropologist in this passage to the approaches to research used by **one** other anthropologist you have studied. Make reference to concepts and ethnographic material in your answer. [10]

References:

Marina Gold, Liminality and the asylum process in Switzerland. *Anthropology Today*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd. © 2019
Marina Gold. *Anthropology Today* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Royal Anthropological Institute.