

The Department of Anthropology Presents

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Enduring Limbo: Seeking Asylum in the American Midwest

Asylum claimants in the United States—those who seek protection due to a “well-founded fear of persecution” in their countries of origin—often live for years in a state of limbo, as they may ultimately be granted the right to remain in the US or be forcibly expelled. They are subjected to myriad institutional practices that cast them as criminal or morally suspect. This talk investigates how the system to which vulnerable asylum seekers appeal for protection emerges as one that inflicts new forms of violence and suffering upon them. Drawing on ethnographic research with asylum claimants in the American Midwest, I trace the lived consequences of being embedded in this complex and onerous political-legal system. I discuss how a sense of existential limbo generated by the asylum process evoked particular subjective and affective states, transforming the ways in which asylum claimants inhabited their bodies and social worlds. I also address the inter and intrapersonal strategies that asylum claimants drew upon to actively endure this painful state of being “stuck.”



*Reception to follow immediately in SSB 269 Spiro Library