



## SESSION ABSTRACT

### **Exploring everyday narratives in the shadow of conflict: uncovering social meanings in the Middle East and beyond**

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**Abstract:** The Middle East has seen an ebb and flow of protracted conflicts, occupation, corruption and various forms of violence, leading to ever-increasing social inequalities, insecurity, and economic difficulties, among other issues. This raises the questions of how people themselves perceive their lives and how they are able to explain living under political instability, continuous crises, or being displaced and uprooted from their homes. In other words, how do individuals - be it children, young people or adults - make sense of their lives in situations of adversity?

By adopting emic approaches when engaging with people in the field, anthropologists use different means to explore people's everyday lives. In this workshop we make the case for the exploration of bottom-up narratives to reveal otherwise invisible experiences. By focusing on how people present themselves and showcase their own voices, we uncover people's understandings of their surroundings and their approaches to confronting and adapting to political, social and economic uncertainties.

We welcome contributions from across the region and beyond that explore people's narratives and their representation from different methodological and theoretical perspectives. The session aims to reveal the invisible structures within a society and uncover the construction and deconstruction of different social meanings. Moreover, questions of positionality and ethics will be examined.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

**Tuesday, September 27, 2022 | Slot 2 | Room 3**

*Opening Remarks: Noura Kamal & Rosalind Willi*

*Noura Kamal: On Stage / Off Stage: Humour and the transnational of Palestinians' Narratives*

*Konstantin Aal & Sarah Rüller: Everyday Activism: The Interlocking of the Political and the Private*

*Ahmed Elmong: Learning in Difficult Times: Prefigurative Learning Spaces in Post-Revolutionary Egypt*

*Discussion: 20 Minutes*

**Tuesday, September 27, 2022 | Slot 3 | Room 3**

*Rosalind Willi: Home, away, or both? Exploring child wellbeing narratives among Syrian-Armenian 'returnees in Armenia*

*Klaudia Kosicinska: Azerbaijani-Armenian minorities relations in Georgia after the 2020 Karabakh war - (un) agreeable neighborliness and uncertain future*

*Ivan Posylnyi: Practices of Border Crossing in the Occupied Part of Donbas*

*Discussion & Final Remarks: 30 Minutes*

## SESSION PAPERS

**On Stage / Off Stage: Humour and the transnational of Palestinians' Narratives**  
Noura Kamal

Since 1948 Palestinians are confronted with continuous violence. Being under the Israeli occupation for decades has not only pushed individuals to confront the political upheaval in everyday life, but has also prompted them to create a space where their voices can be heard and acknowledged by those who are living outside Palestine.

Communicating with people from different parts of the globe via social media provides Palestinians with a space to resist and confront the occupation by exposing its violent practices to the world. On the one hand, sharing their stories with others has become a way to deal with the pain which is imposed on them, as per Veena Das's argument that the acknowledgment of pain by others makes the pain bearable. On the other hand, connecting with those who are far from the Palestinians' struggle leads to the construction of a common language which is connected to the basic rights of humans against the injustice of hegemonic power structures within and outside Palestine.

In this presentation, I will explore the stories of Palestinian comedians shared via social media and how this helps people to adopt a specific kind of steadfastness (*Şumud*). Moreover, I will share my reflections on how creating a transnational link with others via sharing their narratives provides tools of resistance to encounter the everyday violence which is imposed on them by the Israeli occupation.

## Everyday Activism: The Interlocking of the Political and the Private

Konstantin Aal, Sarah Rüller

Activism is not something that starts and stops at a certain time of day. For those who care passionately about something and wish to bring about change, it inflects every aspect of their lives. This has implications for how we understand activism and the impact it has on everyday practices, including the use of ICT. In this talk, we focus upon the activist activities in a specific village in Palestine and the role played within them by one of the village's principal activists and his family. The activist in question has been the subject of an ongoing ethnographic study for at least a decade and we have been given privileged access to all aspects of his life. Thus, we have an extremely rich body of longitudinal data about what it takes to be an activist in modern-day Palestine and the impact that has upon everyday family life. We have seen how activism has come to play a part in the lives of everyone in the activist's household. Of course, family life is not static. Children grow up, major life changes occur and people come and go. At the same time political situations evolve and the concerns of activists within them. So, we have also developed a rich understanding of how activism changes over time and how everyday practices have to adapt to accommodate those changes, including the use of ICT. Here, we point to how activism, everyday life, and the use of ICT are indelibly intertwined and not reasoned about by activists as separate matters. Thus, to fully understand the place of ICT within activist life, one has to see these things as mutually implicative, rather than as different concerns to be studied in isolation. We conclude by reflecting upon implications for the future design of technological support for activism.

## Learning in Difficult Times: Prefigurative Learning Spaces in Post-Revolutionary Egypt

Ahmed Elmongy

In the past 11 years, Egyptians have experienced tumultuous times with extreme political and social transitions, with a revolution in 2011 changing the country and altering the trajectory of many lives. The revolution was a turning point for a generation that sparked hope and the possibility of a different future and a transformation in the country. Witnessing the revolution inspired various people to take the initiative toward forms of change and alternatives, not only in politics. But the revolutionary moment did not last long, with the 2013 coup marking the beginning of a new era that shattered the hopes and possibilities of the revolutionaries. This coup brought an authoritarian system to power, which eventually brought the revolution to a halt through oppressive measures. In my research, I investigate the alternative education and the learning spaces that emerged in Egypt after the 2011 revolution as an afterlife and a continuity for the revolution. How do these spaces enact forms of prefigurative politics through everyday politics of solidarity and alternative ways of being and knowing in repressive and difficult times of the post-2013. I demonstrate how under counter-revolutionary repression where the public space is depoliticized, new meanings and spaces of politics and resistance emerge. Using the case of one of the learning spaces in Cairo, Egypt, I look at the revolution beyond being a mere event but as a process, how it has its afterlives and how in time of repression, the political expand through other means and forms. I employ a prefigurative lens (ways of organizing and social relationships in the present that reflect future goals) in understanding the case study at hand and how its participants engage in alternative lifestyles, ways of being and define politics as an act of the everyday.

## **Home, away, or both? Exploring child wellbeing narratives among Syrian-Armenian 'returnees' in Armenia**

Rosalind Willi

Migration, displacement and mobility is a lived reality for millions of children and young people across the globe. While in the last two decades there has been an increase in scholarship looking into the life worlds of children and young people engaged in mobilities, children's wellbeing experiences in the context of family mobility have largely remained invisible. Against this backdrop, this contribution aims to highlight the wellbeing narratives and experiences of a group of children and their families who have been displaced as a result of the Syrian war: Syrian-Armenians who have moved to their historic and 'imagined' homeland, Armenia.

The presentation explores the gendered, generational and social dimensions of child wellbeing experiences and narratives in this context of mobility and displacement. The contribution will analyse how different areas of wellbeing are shaped and interconnect at the micro-level of the (extended) family, with a particular focus on how children of different ages negotiate their wellbeing in their everyday lives. The paper draws on seven months of qualitative research in Yerevan, Armenia, where I employed visual and participatory child-centred methods to explore the lived experiences of children and their families. This abstract was written from the field, meaning that the conference contribution will provide first insights from my fieldwork.

## **Azerbaijani-Armenian minorities relations in Georgia after the 2020 Karabakh war - (un) agreeable neighborliness and uncertain future**

Klaudia Kosicińska, Anna Cieślewska

This presentation focuses on the Azerbaijani-Armenian relations in two regions of Georgia in the context of the 2022 Karabakh conflict. However, despite the fact that Georgia was not directly involved in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, its geopolitical position and presence of Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities made the country vulnerable to its consequences. Due to diverse ethnic composition, history, and political determinants in both places, people have developed contrasting approaches and strategies while dealing with interethnic relationships. Drawing on field research conducted in 2020, and in the years 2021-2022 (together with dr Anna Cieślewska) this presentation presents that over a year after the war, the situation has calmed down to some extent, but tensions remain, still influencing Armenian-Azerbaijani relations in Georgia.

References (selected):

Cornell, Svante, *Autonomy and Conflict. Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*. Uppsala, 2002.

De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York University Press, 2003.

Gachechiladze, Revaz. "National idea, state-building and boundaries in the post-Soviet state (the case of Georgia)". *GeoJournal*, 43. 1997.

## **Practices of Border Crossing in the Occupied Part of Donbas**

Ivan Posylnyi

Before 2014, one would spend about 8 hours on the train to get from Kharkiv to Luhansk. The informal "students' capital of Ukraine", Kharkiv, is about 330 km away

from Luhansk, the easternmost city in Donbas. In 2014 the situation changed when the two Russian-controlled self-proclaimed republics emerged in Donetsk and Luhansk. The territory of Donbas became the armed conflict zone and 330 km transformed into a tiresome 765-km journey in order to avoid the danger of the war. The average trip would then take about 22 hours, at least a third of which was waiting at the border crossing. Time, therefore, is one of many dimensions of the new reality for Ukrainians who appear to live in the pro-Russian quasi-republics of Donbas. In my paper, I take a closer look at different aspects of everyday practices of moving between occupied and non-occupied parts of Donbas in 2015-2022. By analyzing Luhansk border-crossing chats, I explore people's experiences of going through various checkpoints in the context of occupation and war. In particular, I focus on the regimes of (im)mobility concerning different groups of people: men and women, elderly, children, people with disabilities, Luhansk residents and non-residents, one-time crossers and those who move back and forth on the daily basis (e.g. self-employed entrepreneurs), etc. Each of these groups of people had to adapt to the new social reality with its emerging formal and informal rules and practices. These include people's experiences of legal and illegal border crossing; practices of arriving at the checkpoints and queueing there; communication with border controllers; using checkpoint facilities; etc. In addition, people's self-representations in such group chats will be examined.