

Transforming Research Epistemologies: KnowWar Final Conference Report

Adriana Qubaiova



ABOUT KNOWWAR

The research project KnowWar (Knowledge Production in Times of Flight and War – Developing Common Grounds for Research in/on Syria) is a cooperative project between the Syrian Center for Policy Research, the Department of Development Studies at the University of Vienna, the NGO Mousawat, the Centre for Development Studies at Birzeit University, and the Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education at the Alps-Adriatic University of Klagenfurt.



Based on reconfiguring solidarities in conflict and war zones, KnowWar rests on the following pillars:

- to research solidarities in and between marginalised Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese communities in Lebanon,
- to work out a concept of solidarity economy under conditions of armed conflict in Syria and colonial occupation in Palestine, and
- to conceptualise epistemologies for transformative research strategies.

KnowWar is funded by the Austrian Development Agency. For further information, please visit <https://www.know-war.net/>.

DISCLAIMER

2022 © KnowWar, All Rights Reserved

The views expressed herein are solely those of the author(s).

COVER PHOTO: Rawya Moussa

DESIGN: Anas Abedrabo

EDITOR: Keri Jones



Transforming Research Epistemologies: KnowWar Final Conference Report

Adriana Qubaiova

Table of Contents

OPENING REMARKS.....	2
KEYNOTE: EMERGING SOLIDARITIES IN TIMES OF GLOBAL CRISES AND WAR.....	3
ROUNDTABLE 1: TRANSFORMING RESEARCH EPISTEMOLOGIES IN WAR ZONES	4
HELMUT KRIEGER	5
NISREN S. H.	5
Q&A	6
ROUNDTABLE 2: RESEARCHING SOLIDARITIES IN LEBANON	7
RAMIA ISMAIL AND RAWYA MOUSA.....	7
RAED ESHNAIWER	9
Q&A	10
ROUNDTABLE 3: EXPLORING SOLIDARITIES IN THE SYRIAN CONFLICT	11
ZAFER NAHHAS	11
TITLE: POLITICISING IDENTITY IN THE SYRIAN WAR	11
BASILEUS ZENO	12
Q&A	13
ROUNDTABLE 4: CONFRONTING WAR AND COLONIALISM – SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN SYRIA AND PALESTINE	14
RABIE NASSER	14
TAREQ SADEQ.....	15
OMAR DAHI	16
Q&A	17
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: RESEARCHING BACK – CONTRADICTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES	18
Q&A	19
APPENDIX.....	21

Opening Remarks

Helmut Krieger | Department of Development Studies | University of Vienna

“Researching ‘back’ by innovatively creating epistemologies and methodologies is a starting point for us”



Aspects of a transformative research strategy

- Analysis of basic global conditions
 - Imperialism and global capitalism
 - Asymmetric multipolarity at global level
 - Acceleration of global contradictions regionally
- Analysis of local/regional conflict and war zones
 - The contested state: political, military and social forces
 - Political economy of conflict and war
 - The significance of identity politics
- Engagement with emancipatory social initiatives and movements
 - Learning from subalterns as political subjects
 - Intervening in counterhegemonic discourses and practices
- Transformative potential of research methods
- Transdisciplinary research team

Helmut Krieger

After a warm welcome, the project leader Dr. Helmut Krieger provided an overview of the KnowWar project’s main research topics, questions, partners, and goals.

Over the last three years, KnowWar has been dedicated to researching solidarities between and among marginalised Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese communities in Lebanon, and to work out a concept of solidarity economy under conditions of armed conflict in Syria and settler-colonial occupation in Palestine. Additionally, in asking what forms of solidarities are still present between marginalised communities in Lebanon, and in which ways the solidarity economy can be an alternative model to counter the conflict economy in Syria, the project has managed to put forward a conceptualisation of epistemologies for transformative research strategies.

Given the tenuous conditions under which the research was conducted, an understanding prevails that social phenomenon (including protests, social movements and uprisings) cannot be adequately analysed by adopting mainstream research strategies, tools, and epistemologies. Researching ‘back’ by innovatively creating epistemologies and methodologies is hence the project’s starting point.

Through the research work of the five partners – the Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR), the Center for Development Studies at Birzeit University (CDS), Mousawat, the Department of Development Studies at University of Vienna (DDS), the Center for Peace Research and Peace Education, and Alps-Adriatic-University Klagenfurt (ZFF) – the team transfigured various methods of transdisciplinary research to understand solidarities in times of conflict and war.

Importantly, the project faced several challenges throughout its implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic created numerous obstacles for data collection, as well as roundtable meetings and discussions with interview partners due to movement restrictions, lockdowns, and various pandemic regulations. The 2021 Palestinian revolt and Israeli militarised attacks and bombings of Gaza strained the Palestinian partners' living conditions, causing immediate threats to their lives. Likewise, the continuous armed conflict in Syria and the ensuing economic crisis was a permanent yet unpredictable condition of instability for the partners working on Syria and with Syrian interlocutors. Finally, the collapse of the Lebanese currency and the ensuing economic collapse gravely limited the partners' access to basic needs and services, including food and electricity, and curtailed their mobility. In the words of Dr. Krieger: "Given the massive destruction, forced displacement, and war crimes, it is no surprise that creating just and sustainable processes to overcome imperialism, poverty, [...] have diminished. But we have also observed cycles of protest and mobilization under fundamentally changed conditions. And this was our starting point".

Keynote: Emerging Solidarities in Times of Global Crises and War

Vijay Prashad | Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research

"The cry that comes from below is much richer than what one reads from dry textbooks of political science"



Opening with a reflection on the murder of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, Vijay Prashad firstly reflected on the ongoing unjust occupation of Palestinians and the Arab world's predicament as a target for Western militarised interventions. He argued that calls for democracy from the Arab world must be understood as cries for liberation in their respective contexts. This entails questioning the over-reliance on western principles of democracy in analyses of the region, especially given western states' proven investment in supporting authoritarian regimes and undermining Arab uprisings.

Turning to Syria, Prashad reflected on the absence of critical discourses on imperialism in academic knowledge production, especially given the dominance of the War on Terror discourse as an explanatory framework. He further stated that the Syrian case ceased to be about only a conflict over Kurdish independence, or about the re-balancing of regional powers, and instead has become one over fighting Russia's and China's growing powers manifested through a global conflict over energy (including not only oil and gas, but also access to strategic ports for international trade).

Questions from the audience included seeking clarification on why the Syrian conflict is considered exceptional in relation to other conflicts in the region such as in Iraq and Yemen, available mechanisms of supporting Palestinians in their fight against Israeli occupation and in supporting Palestinian journalists, and the future of the heightened NGOisation the region is undergoing.

Commentators also challenged Prashad's emphasis on imperialism as a frame, arguing that it does not explain the Syrian regime's destruction of its own land, public space, and work force. Rabie Nasser argued: "We are without an alternative. We need to look beyond US, Russia, and China, to see how solidarity between people even after the destruction in Syria is possible [...]. Even in Iraq, Sudan, and elsewhere, people still believe they can make a change, and are not subordinated to the oppression". Prashad responded in agreement, saying that we are all in search of a national or regional project; however, the problem is the strategy to get there.

Prashad finished his intervention by emphasising the role of the weapons trade and production in perpetuating armed conflict in the region, and the need to integrate this trade into any analysis on knowledge production in war and conflict:

"For a platform like KnowWar, you don't centralize the question of the arms trade because it is obvious. We neglect it because it is obvious, and it is then normalized, and disappears from your analysis. It should be front and center in (y)our intellectual work."

Roundtable 1: Transforming Research Epistemologies in War Zones

Nisren S. H. | Women Now for Development

Lena Meari | Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences and Institute of Women Studies
| Birzeit University (not present due to Al-Akleh's assassination)

Helmut Krieger | Department of Development Studies | University of Vienna

Chair: Claudia Brunner | Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education | University of
Klagenfurt (not present due to illness)

Replacement chair: Klaudia Wieser | Department of Development Studies | University of
Vienna

Helmut Krieger

“It is quite important to understand the transformative potential research methods have. We can use them in different ways: to select and collect different knowledges, or, to use them in order to create support and [political] intervention”

Helmut Krieger explained that transforming research epistemologies in war zones is both a contradictory and an ongoing process. Hence, any transformative research strategy must include the following aspects:

- Analysis of basic global conditions: including western imperialism, global capitalism, asymmetric multipolarity, and the acceleration of global contradictions on a regional level.
- Analysis of local/regional conflict and war zones: including a focus on the contested state, political economy of conflict and war, and the role of identity politics.
- Engagement with emancipatory social initiatives and movements: including learning from subalterns as political subjects, intervening in counterhegemonic discourses and practices, and arriving at the transformative potential of research methods

Furthermore, employing a transformative research strategy does not necessarily mean inventing a new approach, but rather transforming how we use existing research methods. For example, instead of using a liberal ‘do no harm’ approach in field research, we prioritise working with a transdisciplinary team that ensures grounded analysis of the conditions of research themselves, hence aiding in building a transformative approach.

Nisren S. H.

“To continue having such collections of knowledge was a means of survival; [a way to say] that we will not be defeated”

Nisren S.H. (name removed for protection), began her talk by tracing the origins of cooperation between the organisation she works for, Women Now for Development, and the team of the KnowWar project. As a feminist Syrian organisation, Women Now aims to produce knowledge and narratives about women’s lives under conditions of war. One of their research projects formed the backdrop for the establishment of “Families for Freedom”; a women-led Syrian initiative for families of forcefully disappeared people which started in 2018.

The culmination of several conversations between KnowWar and Women Now on the latter’s research work inside Syria, is a jointly co-authored paper that asks: what is the meaning of research and its use in contexts of war? The paper – developed by Nisren, Helmut Krieger, Klaudia Wieser, and Adriana Qubaiova – proposes ‘a holistic approach to survival’ as a transformative research strategy. This strategy means not only asking interviewees about

their stories, but also sharing other aspects of their lived conditions such as providing support in seeking medical and psychological care. It is through such a holistic approach that the interview itself becomes part of the support process that Women Now is committed to offering in the communities it works with. Out of such support, spaces for mutual cooperation, debate, and political mobilising can emerge. This was the case with the Families for Freedom who came together through Women Now's research efforts and clustered around the issue of forced disappearance that affects them directly.

Moreover, Nisren explained that most of the researchers and the people they interview have been subjected to similar difficult circumstances (displacement, forced disappearances, war crimes, etc). This means that the Women Now's team has a different positionality; one that can enable it to provide tools to advocate for their rights, means to support their struggles, and open spaces for discussion.

Crucially, a research strategy that adopts a holistic approach to survival means that research is not determined from the beginning but rather supports the people in navigating ongoing strife, hence creating political pathways. People who produce such research must continuously adapt to the conditions on the ground. For example, women inside Syria had to stop their research due to the Turkish invasion in 2019, and the shelling by the Syrian regime on Idleb. However, what Nisren finds really striking in such a process is that when she asked the researchers to stop conducting the interviews due to the unbearable war conditions, some of them refused, and rather insisted on their wish to continue. As she explains in the quotation above, continuing this research was for many of the women researchers a means to survive, a purpose, and a source of hope against ongoing erasures of war.

Q&A

The audience focused their questions on the ethics of research as well as Women Now's approach to intersectionality. Nisren explained that Women Now adopts a bottom-top approach to research, and continuously finds limits when deploying academic theories solely. Therefore, locally rooted and grounded research that is attentive to the needs of those researched offsets some of the unequal power dynamics embedded in research itself.

Roundtable 2: Researching Solidarities in Lebanon

Ramia Ismail | Syrian Center for Policy Research

Rawya Mousa | Mousawat

Raed Eshnaiwer | Center for Development Studies | Birzeit University

Chair: Adriana Qubaiova | Academy of Fine Arts



Ramia Ismail and Rawya Mousa

Title: Exploring Solidarity in Lebanon: An Area-Based Assessment

“The most marginalized communities are the refugee communities, especially the Syrians [...] they lack the tools that enable them to carry out solidarity initiatives”

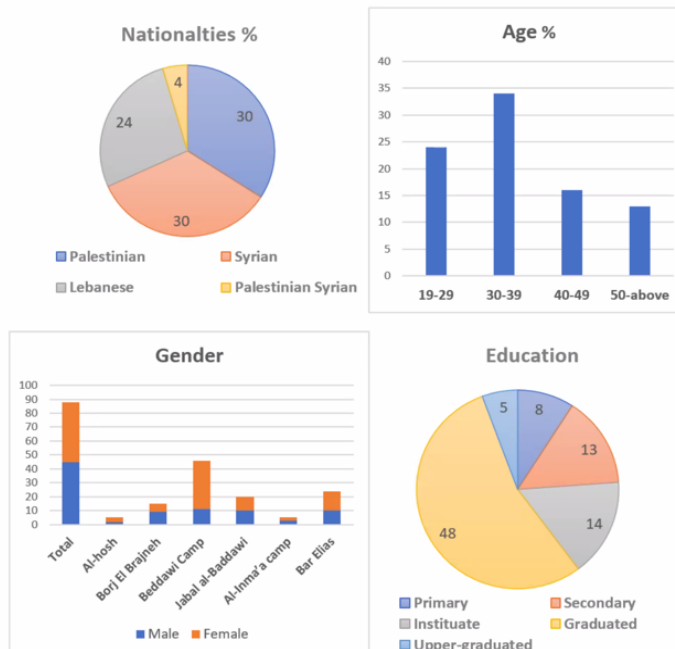
Ramia Ismail and Rawya Mousa presented their extensive empirical study in marginalised communities in Lebanon, based on a complex concept of solidarity developed together with the project partners. They conducted this research in six localities: two Syrian refugees camps, two Palestinian camps, and two Lebanese urban areas. The concept of solidarity posed several dilemmas for the researchers. First, they found that what a group considers solidarity for a common purpose may harm another group in society and result in enmity, hatred or conflict, such as solidarity based on identity. Second, they found that solidarity within a group may be based on domination and exploitation and lead to inequality, or it may be founded within oppressive and tyrannical political systems that deny the freedom of individuals and groups and instead create narrow social solidarity.

Due to the topic’s complexity, Ismail and Mousa used a multi-faceted methodology, including primarily qualitative social research based on a participatory approach which uses the framework of political economy to analyse social phenomena (see the sample below). They also conducted secondary data analysis, pilot surveys, and semi-structured interviews. As part of their commitment to participatory research, they also organised roundtable

meetings and workshops with the communities they worked in and shared their findings with them.

The Sample

- Two-thirds of the sample is at the ages of 20 to 39 years.
- Females form forty-three per cent of the sample.
- More than half of the Key Informants (KIs) have a university degree and above
- About three-quarters of the sample are employed, compared to a quarter who are unemployed and one housewife.
- 94 per cent of the KIs participate in voluntary activity



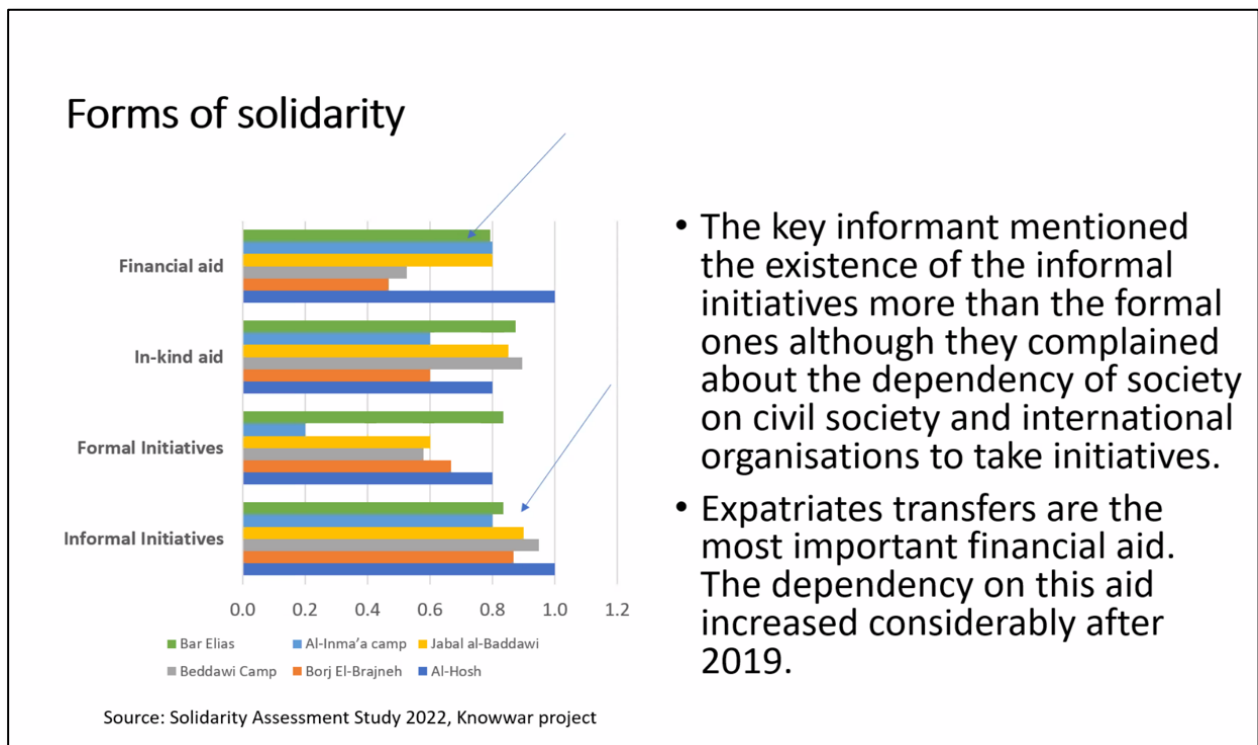
Source: Solidarity Assessment Study 2022, Knowwar project

The researchers' findings varied in terms of location and time period. While those interviewed in all camps always mentioned economic and social factors, they ranked them differently in importance. In Al-Hosh, Borj El-Brajneh and Bar Elias, most key informants concentrated on explaining how economic factors affected solidarity initiatives; while in the Beddawi camp and Jabal Al-Beddawi, the community rather discussed social and cultural factors as central to shaping solidarity. Crucially different was the Al-Inma'a camp, wherein the camp's administrative authority completely controls all solidary actions.

Several key events marked a notable shift in understandings and practices of solidarity as Ismail explained in her presentation. First, the mass protests of 2019 in Lebanon formed a state of collective awareness that the majority of individuals and groups in the studied areas agreed upon and sympathised with. However, the participation of Syrian and Palestinian refugees was cautious and limited. This is because Syrian refugees lack the framework that unites them and the tools that enable them to carry out solidarity initiatives. At the same time, the Palestinian refugee community has been able to organise itself despite these difficulties by initiating several new activities.

Other key events include the economic crisis and currency crash which constituted an obstacle to solidarity and also increased monopoly, exploitation, and the influence of the dominant elites as Ismail further explained. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, solidarity initiatives focused on health and distracted people away from the core concerns that imposed injustice, inequality and the deterioration of the developmental situation in marginalised areas. Nevertheless, various kinds of solidarity continue to shape these camps,

including remittances from family members living abroad (informal aid) and supportive projects by NGOs and CSOs (formal aid), as displayed in the chart below.



Raed Eshnaiwer

“When refugees were asked about the impact of humanitarian organizations, they often answered that ‘these organisations transformed us into beggars’”

Raed Eshnaiwer opened with remarks on the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh in Palestine earlier in the day and the subsequent calls for solidarity with Palestinians. This event made him reflect on the concept of solidarity, its meanings, and how it can be activated in moments of major crises. At the same time, Eshnaiwer wondered who can be in solidarity with whom, how he as a Palestinian can act in solidarity with his people, and what does solidarity means in a context of occupation.

In his work in KnowWar, Eshnaiwer examined social solidarity through a critique of humanitarian assistance. He argued that the regime of humanitarian assistance actually increases the vulnerability of refugee communities by means of forms of domination. Trapping refugees into aid-recipient positions and creating unsustainable assistance increases vulnerabilities in refugee communities. He found that this impacts refugees’ sense of dignity, significance, and agency. Moreover, the binary of a good refugee (the one who plays a proper victim in need of help) and a bad refugee (the one who manipulates assistance and acts with agency) is upheld by the humanitarian regime that decides who deserves assistance. In both cases it affects the dignity of refugees and how they perceive themselves.

When researching the forms of social solidarity in refugee communities, Eshnaiwer notes that solidarity increases during crises especially when states fail to provide protection. In addition, communities are often the first to respond to a crisis by self-organising and providing immediate assistance before humanitarian NGOs engage. Therefore, social networks among refugees themselves create the potential for long-term solidarity as they cover gaps and shortages in the system of international humanitarian aid and state failure.

Lastly, out of the several forms of social solidarity that Eshnaiwer observed, solidarity provided by refugees to host communities was common in several contexts, such as during the Beirut explosion in Lebanon in August 2020 (where Palestinian and Syrian refugees assisted Lebanese residents) and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q&A

The audience was interested in learning more about the methods of research, particularly how specific Palestinian camps were chosen over others as sites of research, why Syrian refugees choose to reside in Palestinian refugee camps despite the poorer living conditions, and how the duality of the good-bad refugee manifests itself in relation to policies targeting women's empowerment.

Ismail and Mousa answered that they deliberately chose Palestinian camps with high numbers of Syrian displaced persons, a factor which was crucial for studying the dynamics of solidarity. Meanwhile, Syrians choose to live in Palestinian camps for a variety of reasons, including the lower cost of living, political and social similarities between Palestinian and Syrian refugees, and a shared understanding of the refugee condition itself.

Eshnaiwer argued that women's empowerment without political support is only a charitable act, and that there can be no real empowerment if it is not based on fighting for the rights of occupied people. In his words: "You can't speak about jobs for [Palestinian] women without understanding that women still live under occupation".

Roundtable 3: Exploring Solidarities in the Syrian Conflict

Zafer Nahhas | Syrian Center for Policy Research

Basileus Zeno | Department of Political Science | Amherst College

Chair: Ramia Ismail | Syrian Center for Policy Research

Zafer Nahhas

Title: Politicising identity in the Syrian war

"I define politicising of identities as the deliberate use of persons' different belongings and identities by various entities and actors in the service of armed conflict."

يعرّف المركز، إجرائياً، مصطلح تسييس الهوية بأنه

مجموعة السياسات والممارسات التي تهدف إلى تطويع وتسخير الانتماءات والمعرفات لدى الأفراد والجماعات بهدف إقحامها في النزاع.

ولأجل الدفع بالهويات لتصبح أسلحة مدمرة في النزاع، يسعى الفاعلون إلى اختزال الهوية إلى مجموعة محددة من المعارف، وصولاً إلى معرّف محوري ووحيد ينطلق في جوهره من معرّف مقابل مضاد متناقض مع الآخر.

يقتضي تسييس الهوية أيضاً تشويه فضاءات التفاعل الاجتماعي والثقافي والاقتصادي الطبيعية المرتبطة بالثقافة والهوية والعادات والتقاليد وصورة الذات و صورة العدو؛ ويمتد تسييس الهوية من التأثير على السياق والأحداث في الحاضر إلى الماضي، فيقوم بالاستثمار في الماضي والذاكرة بصفتهم خزانات لا تنضب من أدوات التعبئة.

Zafer Nahhas - ظافر نحاس

Nahhas presented the components of conflict in Syria through two main classifications used in SCPR's work. The first are political and economic components of war, which SCPR analyses through their work on the war economy and broader power structures. This aspect focuses on the erosion of institutions and the emergence of economic dominance by a class benefiting from the war economy.

The second aspect is a social component which the center examines in its research on social capital, crumbling social relations, as well as solidarity and the politicisation of identity. Its main components include the militarisation of conflict, incitement to fanaticism and extremism, and the subsequent forcing of communities to become active members in the armed conflict on the basis of different belongings.

Nahhas views the question of identity as a dual problematic of politicisation through conflict, and of knowledge production during war time. Therefore, a framework that centralises power analysis creates the possibility to answer urgent questions such as how

sectarian identities were developed and politicised, the tools used to mobilise identarian extremism, and how communities adopt or resist this form of politicisation.

Through applying this framework, Nahhas has found the employment of essentialist definitions of identity in conflict as inevitable, hence permitting and justifying practices such as expulsions or killings in Syria. Furthermore, Nahhas argues that identities are not only shaped by historical understandings of gender, sex, race, or ethnicity in a particular community, but also by newly emerging war-related experiences such as surviving detention and torture, internal displacement, becoming a refugee, and shifting political loyalty. All these factors are creating new meanings of identity and are subsequently politicised further on the ground.

Crucially, identity politicisation impacts knowledge production in several ways in Syria. First, it informs the ways in which current events are contextualised, and informs the writing of discourses on conflict along identarian lines. Second, it projects itself into the past, re-writing memories and re-telling history through a selective frame. In order to produce critical knowledge on the protracted conflict in Syria, it is crucial to address the limits of identity politicisation. This can happen through deep analysis of identities in their respective contexts of conflict, mapping the use of identity discourses in conflict, understanding the society's interaction with such uses, offering alternatives for analysis including ones that stem from social cohesion and aim at restoring social capital.

Basileus Zeno

Title: The making of sects: boundary making and the sectarianisation of the Syrian uprising 2011-2013

"When speaking of sectarianisation, we must deal with terms with much caution, and differentiate analytical from descriptive categories. What happened in Syria was not fated, but systemic."

Basileus Zeno posed the question of how has the social movement in Syria has come to be so dramatically and so quickly transformed from, first, peaceful protests centred around popular demands for political reforms, to the broadly national movement calling for "Revolution for all Syrians," and then to the ongoing bloody civil war with an increasing visibility of sectarian and militarised discourses. Moreover, it was common to portray the conflict in terms of Sunni versus Shia in the first years of the conflict; Zeno asked how this was made possible.

In his intervention, Zeno traced how local and supralocal activists' reactions to the regime's brutal violence and its master narrative culminated in the activation and politicisation of the category of 'sect' as a residual sociality in the years from 2011 to 2013. To arrive at a critical understanding of sects and sectarianism, he challenges the treatment of 'sects' or 'ethnic' groups in 'groupist' terms: which is the tendency to analyse, represent, or perceive identity categories as substantial and real entities.

He further argued that, following the militarisation of the Syrian uprising, which began in the summer of 2011, the dynamics of internationalisation were intensified and new strategies of categorisation and identification practices emerged online and on the ground. In particular, by appealing to sectarian framing, the Syrian regime sought to both mobilise its supporters against the potential threat of 'others' and to discredit the growing protest movements as well as to demobilise non-sectarian protesters and potential joiners.

In this sense, he argues that analysing the dynamics of 'sectarianisation' as a process by centring 'groupness' as an analytical category, rather than 'sects' conceived as unitary actors, makes discernible the dynamics of intra-conflict amongst various groups vis-à-vis meanings, social powers, public spheres and subjectivity that are otherwise made invisible by the terms through which the sectarian discourse operates.

Zeno concluded by claiming that the increasing visibility of sectarian frameworks and the demobilisation of non-sectarian actors were parts of boundary-making strategies pursued by actors who sought to have a monopoly over the symbolic representation of the uprising, and were contingent on the escalation of violence, the militarisation and internationalisation of the uprising, and the transnationalisation of sectarian networks. This is pivotal for understanding the shifts of discourses during the first two years of the Syrian conflict.

Q&A

The Q&A session focused on the place of violence in identity-making. The presenters mentioned they view armed violence as a driver for mobilising identities. However, they warned that we must be aware of the forms of violence that exist in our communities, including structural violence that exists within policies and laws in society, and that can influence the potential of fanaticism to arise.

Further questions compared the Syrian conflict with groups suffering from decades-long conflict and fragmentation, such as Palestinians. The presenters agreed that there is a hierarchy of victimhood in our analysis of conflicts overall, and several groups are not included in this work as the presenters try to focus on one vector or one phenomenon at a time. However, there is much to be learnt from other historical junctures, such as the collapse of Soviet Union in 1990, which ushered in an explosion of ethnic questions in former Yugoslavia.

Roundtable 4: Confronting War and Colonialism – Solidarity Economy in Syria and Palestine

Rabie Nasser | Syrian Center for Policy Research

Tareq Sadeq | Department of Economics | Birzeit University

Omar Dahi | Hampshire College

Chair: Samia Al-Botmeh | Faculty of Business and Economics | Birzeit University



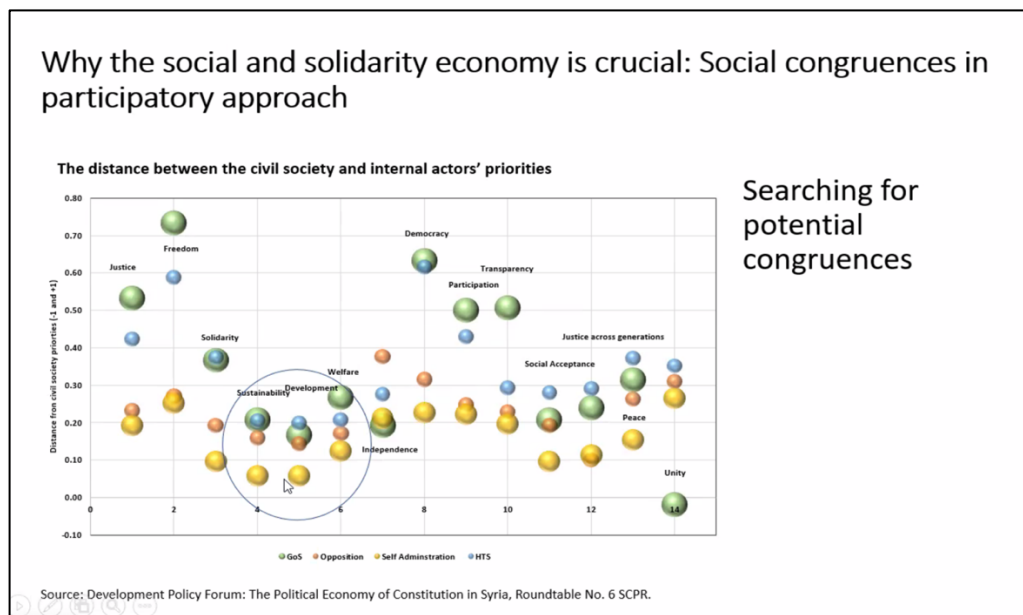
Rabie Nasser

Title: Social and Solidarity Economy to Counter Conflict in Syria

“Alternative policies should focus on reducing dependency in all sectors, ensuring food security and supporting local production, providing inclusive and fair access to resources.”

Rabie Nasser reviewed the main characteristics of the Syrian economy today. Since 2011, Syria has transformed into a conflict economy, ripe with fragmentation, dependency, poverty, inequality, social degradation, and institutional distortion. Moreover, despite the Syrian regime’s ceasing of some military operations, the economy continued its stagnation and the country suffered from a sharp currency devaluation.

Nasser offers the concepts of social and solidarity economy as crucial in expanding the role of society in economic institutions and enhancing social capital, hence shifting more power and social capital to society. As a result, Nasser argues, the society’s political role will expand, creating more space for dialogue and informal public policies.



Furthermore, linking the social and solidarity economy to integration and development agendas encourages the manifestation of alternative policies. Such alternatives must centralise questions such as poverty reduction, food sovereignty, inclusive and fair access to economic opportunities, fair environment for productive activities, and network building, among other things, in order to encourage the flourishing of social and human capital and solidarity.

Tareq Sadeq

Title: Solidarity Economy and Unions' Struggle in Palestine: A Pathway for united resistance and perseverance in Palestine

"Unions [in Palestine] have the potential to bridge between themselves especially through unionisation, and hence provide a framework for the struggle against neoliberalism, colonialism, and for the people's right to access economic resources."

اقتصاد التضامن والنضالات النقابية

نهج متحد للمقاومة والصمود في فلسطين

طارق صادق
جامعة بيرزيت

Omar Dahi

Omar Dahi

Adriana Qubalova

Samia AlBotmeh

Rabie Nasser

Rawya Moussa

Tareq Sadeq

Host

Tareq Sadeq offered an overview of the case of Palestinian economies which have undergone different phases of subjugation under the Israeli occupation. Notably, since the Oslo Accords in 1993, the Palestinian economy has been increasingly dependent on its Israeli counterpart, which has led to higher rates of poverty and unemployment, an increase in Israeli imports but not in Palestinian exports, a susceptibility to be strongly affected by external factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and a weakening of Palestinians' ability to resist Israeli occupation.

In imagining an alternative economic model as part of rebuilding Palestinian society and fighting dependency, Sadeq proposed three phases in a chain of solidarity: creating ties between socially and economically similar members of various groups and communities, then bridging these communities; followed by linking them to economic resources. Similar experiments can be observed in the example of public committees in the first Intifada, which aimed to resist the occupation by creating a frame of internal joint production. However, the absence of bridging between the multiple public committees and the lack of coordination between the various political factions resulted in the committees' dissolution and the end of the popular intifada.

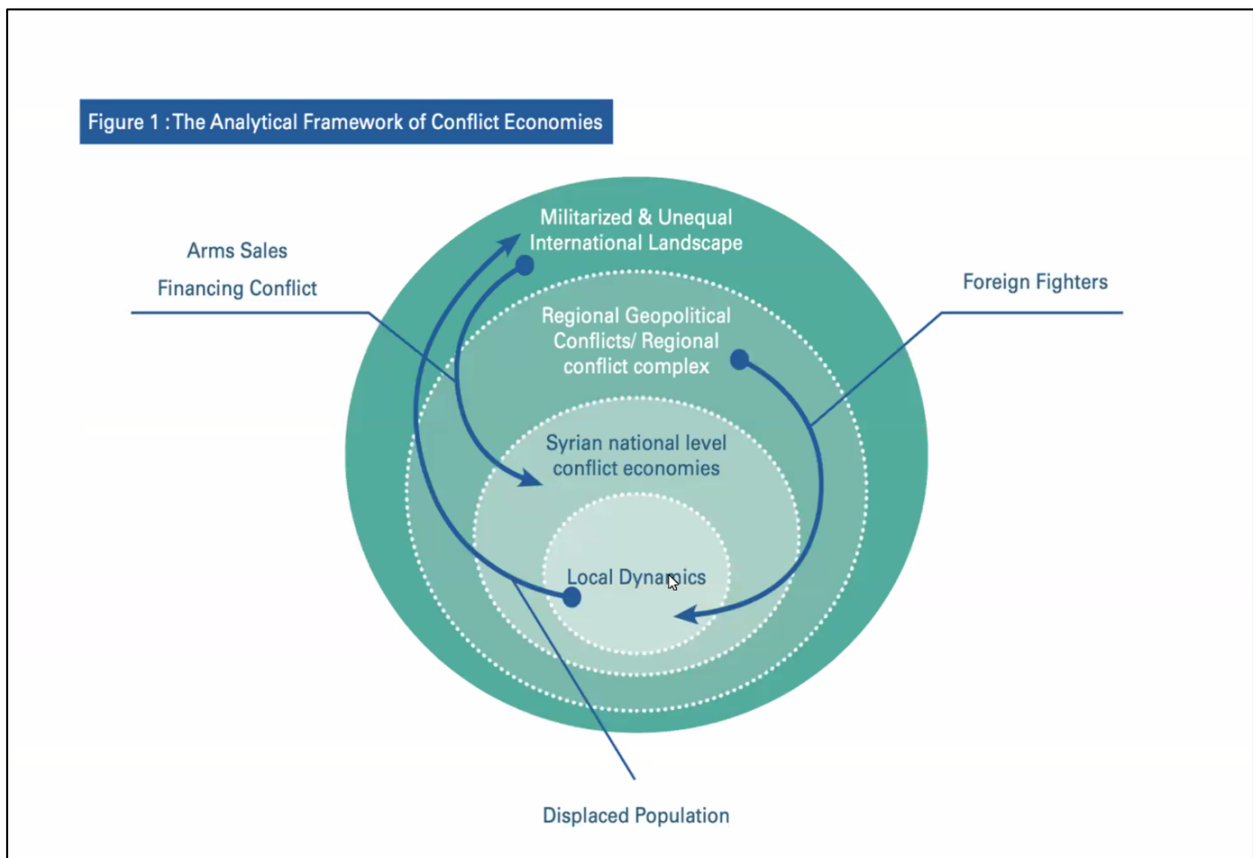
As for unions, they managed to create decentralized networks that resisted occupation. Despite the absence of unions belonging to different political parties, independent groups emerged and have successfully argued for workers' and labour rights in Palestine, even creating cooperatives.

Therefore, Sadeq proposed a united path that includes economic solidarity, struggle against occupation, and unionising. He argued that a shared struggle across these entities will aim to take control over access to economic resources from the Israeli occupation as well as from capitalist institutions.

Omar Dahi

“'Peace' itself is not the goal, but transformation away from policies and drivers that create and sustain injustice and conflict.”

Omar Dahi presented a case for a comprehensive framework that understands conflict economies through analysing the interconnections between the military and security domains, the economic and the social, and political policies before and during the Syrian conflict. Additionally, such a framework must allow for understanding the conflict as including intra-state conditions (the fiscal weakness of Arab states, general economic stagnation in the region in the 1990s, and the continuation of neoliberal policies in the 2010s) as well as inter-state dynamics (policies proposed by the state on a local level, currency devaluation, regime change, local effects of sanctions, and vast militarisation).



Dahi then provided a detailed overview of the foundations of productive economies, comparing them with the foundations of conflict economies. For example, material capital as a foundation of a productive economy is translated into conflict-centred activities such as destruction and pillage in a conflict economy. Likewise, while human capital is central for production, in a conflict economy, killing, starvation, and displacement become central practices that erode human capital.

In order to dismantle conflict economies, Dahi proposed working on three levels. First, on the international level, it is essential to reject the normalisation of war, challenge the logic of great power competition and non-alignment, and centre the issues of climate and economic justice. Second, on the national level, state expenditure must be re-oriented towards human development, while the state should also work to address horizontal and regional inequalities, and provide social protection and economic revival. Third, on the local level, infrastructure must be restored, while looting and pillaging economies must be curtailed in favour of supporting social initiatives instead.

Q&A

The audience posed several questions to this panel, mainly inquiring about further details on how to build economic solidarity in their local contexts. Some asked the speakers to debate the issues of how agriculture, education, and the experience of migration can be used as parts of economic power. The audience also asked for further details on the

experiences of unions in Palestine and whether there remains anything from their work that can be built upon in terms of economic solidarity.

The speakers emphasised the multi-dimensional nature of the Syrian conflict that hence requires a multi layered strategy. For example, the voluntary right of return of refugees to Syria should be secured, as many do not feel safe enough to return, fearing regime retaliation. Human and financial capital remain necessary elements in order to rebuild institutions as transparent and accountable. Specific ideas, such as achieving food sovereignty and gaining control of at least 5% of GDP, were also presented as parts of the solution on how to strengthen human capital and build solidarity.

Concluding Discussion: Researching Back – Contradictions and Perspectives

Ramia Ismail | Syrian Center for Policy Research

Kassem Sabah | Mousawat

Helmut Krieger | Department of Development Studies | University of Vienna

Raed Eshnaiwer | Center for Development Studies | Birzeit University (not present)

Claudia Brunner | Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education | University of Klagenfurt (not present due to illness)

Chair: Klaudia Wieser | Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology | University of Vienna

“We designed the project in another world” – Kassem Sabah



Kassem Sabah reflected on the challenges of conducting this research project in the unpredictable and often volatile context of Lebanon. A key challenge is what he observes as a shift from in-person communities to virtual ones, exacerbated throughout the pandemic.

The curtailing of in-person interactions made it more difficult to build ties and trust with those interviewed online.

A second challenge was ensuring the researchers' security during the 2019 mass protests and the COVID-19 pandemic. These conditions made Sabah wonder how researchers can cope with this insecurity and how they can remain innovative under such conditions.

In terms of researching back, Sabah noted that "We are researching ourselves as victims of these [conditions]". This positionality allows the researchers to understand the vulnerable position the people they meet are living in. As he noted, many have been abused and displaced by their governments, NGOs, and host communities, and this is why it takes time to build trust and a system of relations that can produce the knowledge we have today.

Sabah further urged for prolonging the time of research and to document the process of research itself as well, which was not only conducted under strenuous conditions, but also with an understanding of mutuality. As he said, several respondents understood the research as a moment of transaction: "If you want to use me as a refugee, I want to use you".

Ramia Ismail agreed with the participatory element of research and that it was crucial for building further ties and connections in and between communities. She also reflected on how her understanding of solidarity shifted throughout the research: "Solidarity meant something concrete for me and when I started writing up the research, I understood it differently". It became clear for her that "it's not about producing knowledge but benefiting from knowledge produced".

Helmut Krieger echoed the challenges facing all team members, and reflected on the limitations of the ambitious project, from the state of emergency in Palestine, to the uprising and economic collapse in Lebanon, to the global pandemic. He emphasised that the team used its capacity as a collective to solve different problems as they arose and commended the fieldwork team for conducting the work under such strenuous conditions.

Q&A

The audience was primarily interested in how the team managed the difference in power-relations between partners based in the South and the team leaders based in the North, how imperialism shaped the research, and how the team reconciled the using of quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches. The partners responded that what joins them together is a set of shared values and a joint goal they wanted to achieve.

Ismail reflected on the fact that there was little research done in Syria during the civil war of the 1980s, and therefore, SCPR's work on developing a methodology of how to conduct research and knowledge production under the current war is quite innovative and crucial. Kassem Sabah acknowledged the imperialism of Northern actors such as humanitarian agencies; however, he also mentioned that they are at a moment in which, without them, their work would not have been possible: "if you depend totally on somebody then you are a slave. If the North cuts funding from Mousawat we stay at home". Helmut

Krieger reminded the audience of the tradition of anti-colonial struggles in the Middle East and how this legacy continues to be an inspiring way to liberate people from colonising powers.

Notes on the contributor

Dr. Adriana Qubaiova is a scholar of gender and sexuality in the Middle East. She specialises in feminist and queer anthropology of Lebanon.

Appendix

Solidarities in Conflict and War Zones

KnowWar Final Conference

Online | 11 – 12 May 2022

02:00 - 06:00pm CEST: Vienna, Cairo, Berlin
03:00 - 07:00pm EEST: Beirut, Damascus, Ramallah

Registration 

Initiated by social movements, the revolts in the Arab world over the last decade have reinforced the relevance of inclusive political systems based on fundamental socio-economic rights. Given the massive material and immaterial destruction, the unprecedented levels of war crimes and forced displacements societies in some Arab countries are confronted with, it comes as no surprise that the initial hopes of creating just and sustained processes to overcome authoritarianism, poverty, and imperial interventions have diminished.

Furthermore, Israeli dominance on the Palestinian society in its different localities appears to be as strong as ever. However, cycles of mobilization and protests continue albeit under fundamentally changed circumstances.

In countries subject to counterrevolutions, the space for dissent has diminished to levels lower than they were prior to the conflict. In addition, the analytical confusion about conflict dynamics has made it clear that protests and uprisings in conflict zones under overall imperial conditions cannot be adequately analyzed by adopting mainstream research strategies, tools and epistemologies. Researching back by innovatively creating transformative epistemologies and methodologies has thus become one of the fundamental challenges for KnowWar.

Against this background and based on reconfiguring solidarities in conflict and war zones, the research project KnowWar rests on the following pillars:

- To research on solidarities in and between marginalized Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese communities in Lebanon,
- to work out a concept of solidarity economy under conditions of armed conflict in Syria and colonial occupation in Palestine, and
- to conceptualize epistemologies for transformative research strategies.

At this final online conference, we will discuss our initial research results and explore possible path ways for the future.



Program

Live on Facebook 

Wednesday, 11 May 2022

02:00 – 02:15pm CEST

KnowWar In Conflict and War Zones

Opening Remarks, English with simultaneous translation in Arabic
Helmut Krieger | Department of Development Studies | University of Vienna

02:15 – 03:15pm CEST

Emerging Solidarities in Times of Global Crises and War

Keynote Lecture, English with simultaneous translation in Arabic
Vijay Prashad | Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research
Chair: *Petra Dannecker* | Department of Development Studies | University of Vienna

03:15 – 03:30pm CEST

Break

03:30 – 04:45pm CEST

Transforming Research Epistemologies in War Zones

Roundtable, English with simultaneous translation in Arabic
Nisreen S. H. | Women Now for Development
Lena Meari | Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Institute of Women Studies | Birzeit University
Helmut Krieger | Department of Development Studies | University of Vienna
Chair: *Claudia Brunner* | Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education | University of Klagenfurt

04:45 – 05:00pm CEST

Break

05:00 – 06:15pm CEST

Researching Solidarities in Lebanon

Roundtable, Arabic with simultaneous translation in English
Ramia Ismail | Syrian Center for Policy Research
Rawya Mousa | Mousawat
Raed Eshnaier | Center for Development Studies | Birzeit University
Chair: *Klaudia Wieser* | Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology | University of Vienna

Thursday, 12 May 2022

02:00 – 03:00pm CEST

Exploring Solidarities in the Syrian Conflict

Roundtable, Arabic with simultaneous translation in English
Zafer Nahhas | Syrian Center for Policy Research
Basileus Zeno | Department of Political Science | Amherst College
Chair: *Ramia Ismail* | Syrian Center for Policy Research

03:00 – 03:15pm CEST

Break

03:15 – 04:30pm CEST

Confronting War and Colonialism – Solidarity Economy in Syria and Palestine

Panel Discussion, Arabic with simultaneous translation in English
Rabie Nasser | Syrian Center for Policy Research
Tareq Sadeq | Department of Economics | Birzeit University
Omar Dahl | Hampshire College
Chair: *Samia Al-Botmeh* | Faculty of Business and Economics | Birzeit University

04:30 – 04:45pm CEST

Break

04:45 – 06:00pm CEST

Researching Back – Contradictions and Perspectives

Concluding Discussion, English with simultaneous translation in Arabic
Ramia Ismail | Syrian Center for Policy Research
Kassem Sabah | Mousawat
Helmut Krieger | Department of Development Studies | University of Vienna
Raed Eshnaier | Center for Development Studies | Birzeit University
Claudia Brunner | Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education | University of Klagenfurt
Chair: *Klaudia Wieser* | Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology | University of Vienna

أونلاين | 11 - 12 أيار/مايو 2022

من الساعة 02:00 إلى الساعة 06:00 مساء بتوقيت فيينا ، القاهرة ، بليين
من الساعة 03:00 إلى الساعة 07:00 مساء بتوقيت بيروت ، دمشق ، رام الله

التسجيل

بنة على ما سبق، واستناداً إلى مُراد إعادة تكوين أشكال التضامن في مناطق النزاعات والحروب يقوم مشروع معرفة الحرب على الركائز التالية:

- البحث عن أشكال التضامن القائمة بين وضمن المجتمعات السورية والفلسطينية واللبنانية المهمشة في لبنان.
 - بلورة مفهوم اقتصاد تضامني في سياقٍ واقعٍ يبرز تحت شروط تفرضها النزاعات المسلحة الجارية في سوريا من جهة، وتلك التي يفرضها الاحتلال الاستعماري في فلسطين من جهة أخرى.
 - بلورة تصوّر مفاهيمي لنظريات معرفيّة تُغذي الاستراتيجيات البحثية التحوّلية.
- في مؤتمرها الختامي، سنناقش خلاصتنا البحثية الأوتّية، وننظر في مختلف المسارات المستقبلية المحتملة.



With Funding From
Austrian
Development
Cooperation

BIRZET UNIVERSITY

ALPEN-ADRIA
UNIVERSITÄT
KLAUFENBURG

موساوات

universität
wien

مركز دراسات
الشرق الأوسط
والمغرب
والبحر الأبيض
المتوسط

KnowWar

التضامن في مناطق النزاعات والحروب

المؤتمر الختامي لمشروع معرفة الحرب

لقد عزّزت الانتفاضات في العالم العربي على مدى العقد الماضي، والتي انطلقت على شكل حركات مجتمعية، أهمية النظم السياسية التشاركية والضامنة للحقوق الاجتماعية والاقتصادية الأساسية. لقد سعت هذه الانتفاضات إلى خلق سيورٍ عادلة ومستدامة ترمي إلى التغلب على الاستبداد والفساد والتدخلات الإمبريالية، لكن هذه التطلعات تراجعت مع ما شهدته المنطقة من دمار مادي ومعنوي هائلين، وانتهاكات فادحة مثل جرائم الحرب والتجوير القسري في بعض الدول العربية. كما تفاقمّت هيمنة الاحتلال الإسرائيلي على المجتمع الفلسطيني في مناطقها المختلفة، ولكن وبالرغم من الظروف القاهرة تستمر أنماط من العنف والاحتجاجات في السعي نحو التغيير.

أما في الدول الخاضعة للثورات المضادة، تقلّصت المساحات المتاحة للمعارضة، وباتت أوهن مما كانت عليه قبل انطلاق الحراك المجتمعي. في هذا الصدد، يبيّن الارتباك الذي طرأ على التحليلات المتعلقة بديناميكيات النزاعات القائمة، استحالة الخلوّص إلى فهم شافي للاحتجاجات والانتفاضات في مناطق ترزح تحت قيود لقوى إمبريالية، عبر تبني النظريات والأدوات البحثية السائدة. لذلك أصبح تقييم التجربة البحثية وطرح نظريات معرفيّة ومنهجياتٍ تحويليّة من بين أولى هواجس مشروع معرفة الحرب.

مباشر عبر الفيسبوك

برنامج المؤتمر

اليوم الثاني: الخميس 12 أيار/مايو 2022

من الساعة 02:00 وحتى الساعة 06:00 مساء بتوقيت فيينا ، القاهرة ، برلين

02:00 - 03:00 مساءً

استكشاف أشكال التضامن في ظلّ النزاع السوري
طاوله مستديرة: لغة الجلسة العربية مع وجود الترجمة الفورية للغة الإنكليزية
طارق نضاس | المركز السوري لبحوث السياسات
باسيلوس زينو | قسم العلوم السياسية | كلية أمهرست
إدارة الجلسة: راميا اسماعيل | المركز السوري لبحوث السياسات

03:00 - 03:15 مساءً

استراحة

03:15 - 04:30 مساءً

مواجهة الحرب والاستعمار - اقتصاد تضامني في سوريا وفلسطين
لغة الجلسة العربية مع وجود الترجمة الفورية للغة الإنكليزية
ريّح نصر | المركز السوري لبحوث السياسات
طارق صادق | قسم الاقتصاد | جامعة بيرزيت
عمر ضاحي | أستاذ مساعد في علم الاقتصاد في كلية هامشير
إدارة الجلسة: سامية البطمة | كلية الاقتصاد | جامعة بيرزيت

04:30 - 04:45 مساءً

استراحة

04:45 - 06:00 مساءً

تقييم التجربة البحثية - تناقضات ومقاربات
مناقشة ختامية: لغة الجلسة الإنكليزية مع وجود الترجمة الفورية للغة العربية
راميا اسماعيل | المركز السوري لبحوث السياسات
قاسم صباح | مساواة
هيلموث كريجر | قسم دراسات التنمية | جامعة فيينا
رائد الشنوبر | مركز دراسات التنمية | جامعة بيرزيت
كلوديا برونر | مركز أبحاث السلام وتعليم السلام | جامعة كلاغنفورت
إدارة الجلسة: كلوديا فيسر | قسم الأنثروبولوجيا الاجتماعية والثقافية | جامعة فيينا

اليوم الأول: الأربعاء 11 أيار/مايو 2022

من الساعة 02:00 وحتى الساعة 06:15 مساء بتوقيت فيينا ، القاهرة ، برلين

02:00 - 02:15 مساءً

معرفة الحرب في مناطق النزاعات والحروب
الكلمة الافتتاحية: لغة الجلسة الإنكليزية مع وجود الترجمة الفورية للغة العربية
هيلموث كريجر | قسم دراسات التنمية | جامعة فيينا

02:15 - 03:15 مساءً

أشكال التضامن الناشئة في زمن الأزمات العالمية والحروب
لغة الجلسة الإنكليزية مع وجود الترجمة الفورية للغة العربية
فيجاي براشاد | معهد تاري كونفنتال للبحوث الاجتماعية
إدارة الجلسة: بيترا دالير | قسم دراسات التنمية | جامعة فيينا

03:15 - 03:30 مساءً

استراحة

03:30 - 04:45 مساءً

نظريات المعرفة البحثية التحوّلية في المناطق التي تشهد حروباً
طاوله مستديرة: لغة الجلسة الإنكليزية مع وجود الترجمة الفورية للغة العربية
نسرين ج. | منظمة النساء الآن من أجل التنمية
لينا ميغري | قسم العلوم الاجتماعية والسلوكية ومعهد دراسات المرأة | جامعة بيرزيت
هيلموث كريجر | قسم دراسات التنمية | جامعة فيينا
إدارة الجلسة: كلوديا برونر | مركز أبحاث السلام وتعليم السلام | جامعة كلاغنفورت

04:45 - 05:00 مساءً

استراحة

05:00 - 06:15 مساءً

البحث في أشكال التضامن في لبنان
طاوله مستديرة: لغة الجلسة العربية مع وجود الترجمة الفورية للغة الإنكليزية
راميا اسماعيل | المركز السوري لبحوث السياسات
راوية موسى | مساواة
رائد الشنوبر | مركز دراسات التنمية | جامعة بيرزيت
إدارة الجلسة: كلوديا فيسر | قسم الأنثروبولوجيا الاجتماعية والثقافية | جامعة فيينا