

## SESSION 9

SPATIAL PRACTICES AND BELONGING IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC WORLD

## PAPER ABSTRACTS

***Moral Belonging and Shifting Values: Reproduction of Space in Contemporary Istanbul***

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In my paper, I wish to explore various practices of mapping the urban space in Istanbul and the role that morality and values play in negotiating boundaries and continuities between spaces and places. I will especially concentrate on the dividing practices in the district of Beyoğlu which has for centuries provided an example of the height of Istanbul's modernity associated with freedom of expression and individual liberties. However, definitions and expressions of its attributes have never had uniform character but have been subject to intensive struggles over signification and evolved through considerable transformations.

I will discuss the contemporary conflicts over the spatial organisation of the city in the light of ethnographic examples. I will especially concentrate on how different values of egalitarian urbanity of the famous entertainment district around Istiklal Boulevard are compared to those of the poverty-stricken traditional neighbourhoods (*mahalle*) in the proximity. I will consider how people who frequently cross the symbolic boundaries between spaces associated with different moral frameworks manage to deal with complex dynamics of religious, modern and traditional sets of values. These questions will also be related to different ways of understanding spatiotemporal constructions; especially, how the dominant representations of history, heritage and spatial divisions are insufficiently narrow when compared to the complex realities of everyday movement within different urban spheres.

My theoretical aim is to offer an anthropologically grounded view to dynamics of belonging and group-formation when negotiating the ambiguous frameworks of morally appropriate values in the reproduction of urban complexity that can nevertheless remain coherent to individual subjects.

***What it means to act contextually? Public sphere and morality in a Yemeni town***

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In my paper, I will discuss notions of morality and propriety as they have appeared in everyday life in the Southern Yemeni town of Aden during the past decades. In Middle Eastern studies, it has been suggested that most Muslims share inherited conceptions of ideas of the common good. I argue that Adeni social reality and the notion of common good are constituted in a tension between contesting representations of propriety and morality. The parallel prevalence of competing normative representations has not, as I will show, manifested as chaos or as an anomaly, but instead in social dynamics where people have to consider the contextual nature of public propriety. In short, what is proper in one context might be improper in another. It is not a matter of 'manipulating' situations and stakes within them, but of learning to manage in diverse situations. This

learning process is a matter of making proper comportment (/adab, /arab.) an art in everyday life. I will discuss ethnographic case studies where people smoothly move from one morality framework to another thus presenting the contested nature of social reality that, as I argue, has patterned the society in Aden during the course of the dramatic state changes of the past decades. Material for the paper has been collected in anthropological field trips to Aden (from the late 1980s) and in archival studies in London.

***Empirical background of four illustrative cases on Islamic headscarf in Turkey***

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Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the power struggle between the two hegemonic discourses, namely the Islamist and the Kemalist one, has dominated the historical events in the country. This polarization is represented perhaps most visibly in the form of women's dress codes (e.g. Göle 1996). The two hegemonic projects have always been defined according to roles and status of women. Therefore also the disputes between these two projects concern often the rights and responsibilities of dress codes of women (Arat 2005). Hence, while examining the polarization of Turkish society, one possibility is to limit the topic to dress codes and more precisely the veiling of women. This paper presents the background information on four illustrative cases, which show the way in which Islamic headscarf has been used as a symbol or a tool in the battle between the secularist-republican and Islamist discourses.

The first case is about Fadime Şahin, a woman who according to one newspaper article, became to be known as the symbol of the 1997 post-modern coup. Originally, she became famous because of a scandal, as a sheikh's secret mistress. Soon after the event, she removed her headscarf and dyed her hair blond. The republicans used the story to show how the Islamist headscarf was forced to be worn. They raised Fadime as a hero, fighting for her individual rights, against Islamism. The second case is the politician Merve Kavakçı. She was elected as a Virtue Party (the predecessor of the AKP) deputy for Istanbul in 1999. A month after the election, she was prevented from taking her parliamentary seat because of her headscarf, which is banned for civil servants. The third example is the case of Leyla Şahin, who brought a case against Turkey to the European Court of Human Rights in 2005. She insisted on wearing a headscarf at university, but lost her case in the court. The fourth case is the current President's wife, Hayrünnisa Gül. She is the first headscarf wearing First Lady in Turkey, and thus she has attracted a lot of controversy. When her husband was elected president in 2007, her headscarf made more news than the president's own views on religion (Eğrikavuk 2009).

***Revolutionary Couchsurfing Front? Online hospitality networks, tradition, and everyday resistance in Iran***

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Online hospitality networks, such as Couchsurfing.org, have attracted growing numbers of members around the world. The factors both motivating and shaping (and constraining) the use of such networks are, arguably, far more complex and context-bound than suggested by an early study (Bialski 2008). My own, based on a brief fieldwork in 2009, focuses on Iran as the national context. On one hand, the state is considered to be a highly repressive in terms of individual freedoms, characterized by rigid 'Islamic/traditional values', 'moral policing' and anti-imperialist/-westernist legacy

of the Revolution, manifest in peculiar kinds of xenophobia. On the other, the country boasts of world-famous tradition of hospitality, and aims to open up, too, both in international tourism and communication, however 'negotiated' by and within current social and political struggles these trends may be.

Those tensions in mind, I ponder a) in what sense, and to what extent, couchsurfing in Iran could be considered as 'everyday forms of resistance', alongside the analytical facilitator of 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1985, 1990); and b) what kind of contrasts and continuums it may highlight between concepts like tradition and globalization, public and private, etc. While trying to avoid the most obvious pitfalls of 'ethnographic thinness' (Ortner 1994) and idealistic exaggerations in both resistance and internet studies, I explore what sort of transformative potentials or implications practices like couchsurfing may bring about on the local and (perhaps) global level.

### *Negotiating Mobility – Ethnographic Examples from Upper Egypt*

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Based on an ethnographic fieldwork in Upper Egypt, this paper tackles the issue of female mobility in public space. A central question in this paper is how mobile women understand spatial categorisations and discuss spatial practices. Mobility is an embodied activity that is founded on the inseparable relationship between body and space. This paper suggests that, not only the concepts of public and private, but the spatial division between familiar and unfamiliar helps to understand on what basis the mobility of women is regulated and negotiated. In urban Egyptian surroundings, mobility of women often brings about challenges to the notions of family and gender roles. In the patriarchal framework, women have to negotiate their public presence within the community with regard to taken-for-granted principles as the avoidance of shame and respect towards familial authorities. The paper presents ethnographic examples of negotiating mobility in Upper Egypt.