



معهد مواطن للديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان  
Muwatatn Institute for Democracy and Human Rights

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**“Democracy in the Public Square”**  
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**Abstracts of Presentations**

**Reem Bahdi**

**Legalizing Democracy or Democratizing Law?**

This presentation explores disarticulations between notions of the rule of law and of democracy. It explores the ways in which law continues to be an instrument of marginalization within democracies, even as the rule of law is offered as the path to democracy and the outcome of the functioning of democracy. The presentation points to the need for better access-to-justice strategies to counter marginalization. The term “legalizing” in the title of the presentation is intended to convey the ways in which law is used to simultaneously marginalize and redeem.

**Basem Ezbidi**

**The Malaise of the Liberal Model of Democracy?**

The main question is whether democracy is merely in distress or indeed threatened, and whether this condition is temporary or permanent. The main thesis is that democracy is not merely in distress but is indeed threatened, and this is influenced by the following factors: First, the traditional gap between democracy as a concept and as an order of regulation and control; second, the overlap between democracy and power structures on local and global levels; third, the vulnerability of democracy to the massive impact of economic growth, advancing technology, and globalization. These three factors that further complicate the relationship between the notion of rights and sovereignty on the one hand, and the general will of the people on the other. A fourth factor is neo-liberal policies and the ensuing consequences of marginalization and exclusion of large segments of society, both locally and globally. Tackling these ills is possible only after granting recognition of two main components of democracy: justice and equality. Furthermore, one must stop viewing democracy as various sets of procedures, be they elections, the rule of law, separation of powers...etc. Achieving the remedy of these ills is a challenging task due to the economic interdependence between the local and the global setting, and because of the impact of advancing technologies and globalization. This makes the achieving of justice and equality a global quest, yet it still lacks a proper narrative and the effective tools to materialize these goals.

**George Ulrich**

**Habermas on Democracy, Popular Sovereignty, Discourse and Struggles for Recognition**

With reference to Habermas, the presentation outlines three normative models of democracy - liberal, republican and deliberative - and elaborates the role of human rights in relation to each model. Emphasis is placed on certain underlying premises for democratic will-formation and the exercise of popular sovereignty, including reciprocal perspective-taking and struggles for recognition, which in Habermas’ analysis forms an integral aspect of the exercise of democracy in complex societies and political contexts. It is argued that ‘deformations of democracy’ and the rise of a managerial, quasi-authoritarian approach to governance, both globally and in the Palestinian context, may be seen to reflect deficiencies in such underlying premises.

**George Giacaman**

**The Absent Question in the Current Palestinian Situation**

Though persistent calls among Palestinians to heal the rift between Gaza and the West Bank and bring about a rapprochement between Fatah and Hamas have been well-intentioned, I argue that the problem of this rift is overshadowed by a larger dilemma, discussion of which remains absent from public debate in Palestine. There may be several reasons for this silence, including but not limited to the perseverance of a defeated generation that persists in the belief that it has a political role to play. Perhaps Palestinians find themselves caught between two moments; amidst the gradual demise of the old the new is yet to be born. Yet a response to our uncertain, intermediate present is needed.

**Tawfiq Haddad**

**How Neoliberalism Impacted the Prospects of Democracy in Palestine**

The presentation addresses the manner in which neoliberal ideology and its associated policies and practices proscribe the prospects for democratic practice in Palestine. Amidst an extensive dissemination of neoliberal logics and practices in the Palestinian political arena, the presentation traces the complex, hierarchical ascendance within this arena of actors who occupy the commanding heights of coercion, finance and structural / doctrinal policy - Israel and international donors - in relation to actors with far more limited governance powers; the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, or the governing powers in Gaza. The presentation traces the unfolding of these asymmetrical logics through three main articulations of the post-Oslo agenda: peacebuilding (1993-2000); reform (2000-2004) and statebuilding (2005 to 2012) and interrogates the manner in which anti-democratic practices have been legitimized, realized and reproduced across these phases.

**Peter Lagerqvist**

**Writing the People : Textuality, Movement and The Tense of the Everyday**

How might theorizations of the everyday help us think the practice of democracy; the where and when of how democracy would happen, as rendered for example by the idea of the public square? The presentation proposes a notion of the everyday nested in grammatical tense and movement. It seeks to show, departing from observations regarding the demise of graffiti as a form of political practice in the West Bank, how this notion of the everyday might ground an exploration of shifting conditions of possibility for political participation and action in post Oslo Palestine, including but not limited to the procedural routines of liberal democracy.

**Azmi Shuaibi**

**Elections during the National Liberation Era: A Solution or a Problem?**

The national liberation process requires consensus on aims and strategies. This relates not only to the two state solution, but also to ending occupation and to the ways and methods of achieving this goal. Under such conditions elections may play a role that is not conducive to internal unity, given possible completion and polarization. Elections might also block the priorities of this historic period. The presentation will argue that the preferred model for the national liberation period is a wide front that is based upon contemporary priorities.

**Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua**

**A Critical Review of ‘Third Termism’ in African Democracy from an International Law Perspective**

The presentation seeks to explain the factors that account for “third termism” in African politics. To this end the discussion will treat international legal principles concerning unconstitutional changes in governing regimes and collective recognition of governments.

**Belal Shobaki**

**Violent Democratization as a Natural Response to Structural Violence: Theorizing in Light of Arab Turmoil**

A theoretical intervention aiming to explain the violence that occurs during democratic transitions, the presentation is based on an analytical framework provided by Dankwart Rustow. The premise of this framework is that democratic transitions require identity formation by democracy-seeking actors who confront an authoritarian regime, and that this confrontation cannot be free from violence. The presentation argues that when democratization takes place in a state where violence is structural, in which a ruling regime fails to acknowledge its authoritarianism, various forms of violence by reforming actors become inevitable. Yet this violence is not equivalent to that of the governing authority, in terms of the ideology of the perpetrators of violence, their ethical code, or the forms that violence assumes.

**Andrej Kurnik**

**Transnational Democracy on Migrant Route**

Hegemonic conceptions of democracy are constantly challenged by struggles against the imposition of absolute sovereign authority; the tailoring of the world upon the model of sovereign nation states. The presentation argues that migration as a transnational movement constitutes a challenge to such hegemonic conceptions, helping to constitute a democratic imaginary that is neither national nor sovereign. The presentation draws on activist research conducted along a migrant route through the Balkans - the so-called Balkan Route. Along this route, migrants, refugees and local solidarity initiatives have formed hybrid sites of enunciation that enable a questioning of global inequalities and hierarchies, and collectively constitute a practice of transnational democracy- from-below.

**Yazid Anani**

**Liberty, Democracy and the Restructuring of our Cities**

The presentation discusses current urban systemic transformations in Palestine that have profound implications for social equity, democracy and our right to make our urban environments. It compares global, regional and local trends in urban restructuring and the manner in which these trends threaten our capacity to shape the urban subject and urban subjectivity. The presentation builds on historical documents pertaining to the city of Ramallah; a 1994 article by Naseeb Shaheen, which relates his shock, during a visit from the United States, upon seeing the transformation of Ramallah; and documents from the Ramallah Municipal Archives which show how the city has been imagined and re-structured economically, especially for tourism. The presentation is based on a paper authored jointly with Abed Al-Rahman Shabane.

**Lars Grassmé Binderup**

**Democracy vs. Fake News – Is Democracy Today Threatened by the Media and Social Media?**

Democracy depends for its viability on an educated and well-informed public – citizens able to articulate their values and interests competently. This in turn presupposes that news media provide accurate and balanced information about issues relevant to public policy. Recent developments – including the advent of social media – give us reason to doubt that this condition is satisfied in today's media landscape. The paper argues that the future of democracy depends on an increased focus on the epistemic preconditions of a well-functioning democratic process and that new measures – forms of epistemic paternalism – must be introduced. In parallel, the paper takes a first look at the potentially negative human rights implications of such measures, especially with respect to free speech.

**Hasan Ayoub**

**The Impact of Neoliberal Social Engineering on Political Reality in Palestine**

The presentation discusses the form of democracy that has developed under the Palestinian Authority, basing itself on an examination of relations that are assumed to obtain between certain formations of political economy, and their social and political consequences. The presentation draws on the notion of 'kleptocracy' in order to understand Palestinian transformations since 2007, articulating this concept with the logics of neoliberal globalization, as expressed in the Palestinian context through the terminology of 'the state,' civil society, change agents, mobilization capacity, and political culture.

**Lena Meari**

**Neoliberal Technologies of Subject Formation: The University Education System as a Model**

The presentation will trace the impact of neoliberalism on the formation and production of subjects, i.e. it asks how neoliberalism works, hidden from view, to shape subjective views, emotional worlds, and personal aspirations? Pursuant to a theoretical preamble, the presentation will address the repercussions of neoliberal discourse and the possibilities of resisting such discourse within the framework of Palestinian higher education. The presentation argues that while neoliberalism is essentially an economic technique, it operates and reproduces itself through social engineering, forming subjects in accordance with a logic that intersects with that of hegemonic colonial systems. In order to combat these systems, argues the presentation, it is necessary to understand neoliberal technologies of subject formation.

**Ramzi Rihan**

**Democracy between the Possible and the Impossible**

Concept and practice through history. Value and governance systems. Elements that impact democracy negatively and positively. The Palestinian case and its fluctuations: Birzeit University Development as a model.

**Faris Shomali**

**Youth Groups and the Battle over the Usurpation of the Public Sphere**

The presentation addresses the emergence of a number of independent Palestinian youth groups and initiatives after 2011. Active in various social, cultural and political capacities, the groups in question were not affiliated with political parties nor with local or international organizations, and differed widely from each other in terms of the nature of their work. Their emergence coincided with a hijacking of the Palestinian public sphere, through privatization and domination by official "public" organizations. This presentation aims to understand why some of the youth groups in question concentrated their efforts on protests in public spaces, while others conducted activities in private or otherwise closed spheres? What is the logic of the withdrawal into an interior space? Is it a form of encapsulation, which normalizes the usurpation of the public sphere? Does it represent two steps backward in preparation for a step forward? In seeking to answer such questions, what can we learn from the nature of activities that the youth groups undertook in the public sphere?