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Editorial Foreword

Identity, crisis and resistance. As an editorial team, we decided that this is going to be the theme of the next issue of *Antropólus* on a dark, cold January day in 2026. That day seems distant and almost impossible as this issue is published in the midst of a summer heat wave.

Let's start the line with resistance and how we understand it. If nothing else, the recent fall of the authoritarian period of Hungary sheds light on this topic from a new angle. During this recently ended period, various individuals, groups and institutions resisted in their own ways. It is easy to spot resistance when it is happening on the streets, with loud protesters and placards. Make no mistake, while we consider these forms of resistance important and relevant, they were not what we had in mind when the conversation turned in this direction.

Rather we were thinking about resistance in its practical everyday form, ordinary acts that are much closer to our lives and, perhaps for that very reason, more difficult to recognise. Disobedience through care, acts and decisions that push back exploitation, oppression, and domination. Acts of resistance not in a solemn historic sense but through kindness, gestures and smiles that sustain our communities and give us strength to continue. Without going into lengthy explanations of the other two pillars of the issue, we recognise the numerous ever-growing number of faces of crisis around the globe. No pathway exists that allows our individual and collective identities to remain unchanged as we confront and adapt to these crises.

These and many others were our initial thoughts when we started to work on this issue, and we were happy to see that as the manuscripts arrived, that many of the authors engaged with these ideas, either explicitly or implicitly.

This issue weaves together contributions that cross disciplinary, methodological, and geographical boundaries. It features scholars working across anthropology, sociology, gender studies, international relations, peace studies, and political ecology, who come from Turkey, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Jordan, South Africa, and Hungary. The articles engage critical perspectives including decolonial feminist, postcolonial, and interpretive-critical approaches, while exploring questions of memory, space, migration, and aesthetics through ethnographic and qualitative methodologies. Notably, all contributions are authored by women scholars, reflecting the strong presence of women in contemporary critical scholarship across disciplines and regions.

Chapter One begins with reflections on the past, exploring how acts of remembering and what is remembered can function as forms of resistance. The first article, by Ayşegül Adanır, examines how memory is inscribed in urban space, focusing on processes of destruction, transformation, and comparison with what has emerged in its aftermath. The second article by Aigerim Muratova, engages with a collective traumatic past through artistic practice, making the invisible and unspoken visible through material expression. The pair demonstrates how the past lives among us in multiple forms, continually shaping present experiences.

Chapter Two brings together two studies that examine space as a site where identity, crisis, and resistance intersect. While Áldozó Borbála explores the transformation of garages in post-socialist contexts, Farah Ghoul analyses *tatreez* as a symbolic reconstruction of a lost space of belonging. Despite their different settings, both contributions demonstrate that space is deeply embedded in relations of power and is continuously redefined through moments of rupture. Whether through the adaptation of everyday spaces or the preservation of cultural memory in diaspora, the articles show how crises of political and social transformation create opportunities for individuals and communities to renegotiate identity and belonging through both material and symbolic practices.

Chapter Three moves on to how identities are contested and challenged in times of social, political, and medical instabilities, and how people constantly negotiate and resist unequal power structures in order to find their place. Nura Abukhalil's article explores how migrants actively negotiate identity and agency within a broader political context rather than passively integrating. Khomotso Marutla's article examines pandemics as crises, tracing how different knowledge systems of survival emerge and how moments of instability reveal existing social hierarchies. These studies demonstrate how belonging is continuously produced through tensions between exclusion and resistance.

Chapter Four places the ecological dimension of the polycrisis at the forefront. Two excellent articles constitute the section, while their topics differ, parallels can be found between them. Herlina Dedy Listiani, Anna Christi Suwardi, and Wahyu Candra Dewi are focusing on the experiences of Indigenous Suku Anak Dalam women in Indonesia. The article reimagines care not as a private or domestic practice but as an everyday ecological and political act that quietly resists extractive development while

sustaining the relationships on which collective life depends. While in the second article of the section Gyursánszky Ágnes argues that responses to late modern crises are not limited to adaptation and resilience but may also take the form of consciously redefining the conditions of participation, which can be understood as a distinctive form of everyday resistance.

Szerkesztői előszó

Identitás, válság és ellenállás. Szerkesztőségünk egy sötét, hideg 2026. januári napon döntötte el, hogy ez lesz az Antropólus következő számának témája. Az a nap ma már távolinak és szinte elképzelhetetlennek tűnik, hiszen ez a szám egy nyári hóhullám közepette jelenik meg.

Kezdjük az ellenállással, és azzal, ahogyan mi értelmezzük azt. Ha másból nem, a közelmúltban véget ért magyarországi autoriter időszak bukásából is új megvilágításba kerül ez a téma. Ebben a nemrég lezárult korszakban különböző egyének, csoportok és intézmények mind a maguk módján álltak ellen. Az ellenállás könnyen felismerhető, ha az az utcán zajlik, hangos tüntetők és transzparenszek kíséretében. Ne legyen kétségünk: miközben ezeket az ellenállási formákat fontosnak és relevánsnak tartjuk, nem ezekre gondoltunk, amikor a beszélgetés ebbe az irányba fordult.

Inkább az ellenállás gyakorlati, hétköznapi formájára gondoltunk: olyan hétköznapi cselekvésekre, amelyek sokkal közelebb állnak az életünkhöz, és talán éppen ezért nehezebb felismerni őket. Gondoskodáson keresztül megvalósuló engedetlenség, olyan tettek és döntések, amelyek visszaszorítják a kizsákmányolást, az elnyomást és az uralmat. Az ellenállás aktusai nem fennkölt, történelmi értelemben, hanem kedvességen, gesztusokon és mosolyokon keresztül, amelyek fenntartják közösségeinket és erőt adnak a folytatáshoz. Anélkül, hogy hosszasan fejtegetném a szám másik két pillérét, el kell ismernünk a világszerte egyre szaporodó válságok egyre sokasodó arcait. Nem létezik olyan út, amelyen haladva egyéni és kollektív identitásaink változatlanok maradhatnának, miközben szembenézünk ezekkel a válságokkal és alkalmazkodunk hozzájuk.

Ezek és sok más gondolat foglalkoztatott minket, amikor munkához láttunk ezzel a számmal, és örömmel tapasztaltuk, hogy a beérkező kéziratok szerzőinek nagy része – ki explicit, ki implicit módon – ezekkel az eszmékkel foglalkozik.

Ez a szám olyan tanulmányokat fűz egybe, amelyek átlépnek diszciplináris, módszertani és földrajzi határokat. Olyan kutatókat mutat be, akik az antropológia, a szociológia, a gender studies, a nemzetközi kapcsolatok, a béketanulmányok és a politikai ökológia területén dolgoznak, és Törökországból, Indonéziából, Kirgizisztánból, Palesztinából, Jordániából, Dél-Afrikából és Magyarországról érkeznek. A tanulmányok kritikai perspektívákat mozgósítanak – köztük dekoloniális feminista, posztkoloniális és interpretatív-kritikai megközelítéseket –, miközben az emlékezet, a tér, a migráció és az

esztétika kérdéseit etnográfiai és kvalitatív módszerekkel vizsgálják. Figyelemre méltó, hogy valamennyi tanulmányt női kutatók írták, tükrözve a nők erős jelenlétét a kortárs kritikai tudományosságban a különböző diszciplínákon és régiókban.

Az első fejezet a múltra való reflexiókkal indul, és azt vizsgálja, hogyan funkcionálhat maga az emlékezés aktusa és az, amire emlékezünk, az ellenállás egyik formájaként. Az első cikket Aysegül Adanır írta; azt vizsgálja, hogyan íródik bele az emlékezet a városi térbe, a pusztítás és az átalakulás folyamataira, valamint az ezeket követően kialakult állapottal való összehasonlításra összpontosítva. A második cikk, Aigerim Muratova munkája, egy kollektív traumatikus múlttal foglalkozik a művészeti gyakorlaton keresztül, a láthatatlant és a kimondatlant anyagi kifejezéssel téve láthatóvá. A két tanulmány együttesen bemutatja, hogyan él köztünk a múlt sokféle formában, folyamatosan alakítva a jelen tapasztalatait.

A második fejezet két olyan tanulmányt állít egymás mellé, amelyek a teret mint az identitás, a válság és az ellenállás metszéspontját vizsgálják. Míg Áldozó Borbála a garázsok átalakulását kutatja posztoszocialista kontextusban, Farah Ghoul a tatreezt egy elvesztett hovatartozás-tér szimbolikus újraépítéseként elemzi. Eltérő helyszíneik ellenére mindkét tanulmány megmutatja, hogy a tér mélyen ágyazódik a hatalmi viszonyokba, és a törés pillanataiban folyamatosan újradefiniálódik. Akár a hétköznapi terek adaptációján, akár a kulturális emlékezet diaszpórában való megőrzésén keresztül, a cikkek azt szemléltetik, hogyan teremtenek lehetőséget a politikai és társadalmi átalakulás válságai az egyének és közösségek számára az identitás és a hovatartozás anyagi és szimbolikus gyakorlatokon keresztüli újratárgyalására.

A harmadik fejezet azt vizsgálja, hogyan válnak vitatottá és megkérdőjelezővé az identitások a társadalmi, politikai és orvosi instabilitás idején, és hogyan tárgyalják újra folyamatosan az emberek az egyenlőtlen hatalmi struktúrákat a saját helyük megtalálása érdekében. Nura Abukhalil cikke azt tárja fel, hogyan tárgyalják aktívan az identitást és a cselekvőképességet a migránsok egy tágabb politikai kontextusban ahelyett, hogy passzívan integrálódna. Khomotso Marutla cikke a járványokat válságként vizsgálja, nyomon követve, hogyan jelennek meg a túlélés különböző tudásrendszerei, és hogyan tárják fel az instabilitás pillanatai a meglévő társadalmi hierarchiákat. Ezek a tanulmányok bemutatják, hogyan termelődik folyamatosan a hovatartozás a kirekesztés és az ellenállás közötti feszültségeken keresztül.

A negyedik fejezet a polikrízis ökológiai dimenzióját állítja előtérbe. A fejezetet két kiváló tanulmány alkotja; bár témáik különböznek, párhuzamok fedezhetők fel köztük. Herlina Dedy Listiani, Anna Christi Suwardi és Wahyu Candra Dewi az indonéziai Suku Anak Dalam őslakos nők tapasztalataira összpontosít. A tanulmány a gondoskodást nem magán- vagy háztartási gyakorlatként képzei újra, hanem olyan hétköznapi ökológiai és politikai aktusként, amely csendesen ellenáll a kitermelő fejlesztésnek, miközben fenntartja azokat a kapcsolatokat, amelyektől a kollektív élet függ. A fejezet második tanulmányában Gyursánszky Ágnes mellett érvel, hogy a késő modern válságokra adott válaszok nem korlátozódnak az alkalmazkodásra és a rezilienciára, hanem a részvétel feltételeinek tudatos újradefiniálása formáját is ölthetik, ami a hétköznapi ellenállás egy sajátos formájaként értelmezhető.

**COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND HERITAGE |
KOLLEKTÍV EMLÉKEZET ÉS ÖRÖKSÉG**

Heritage, Urban Space, and the Politics of Memory in Socialist Prishtina

Ayşegül Adanır



Caption: Destruction of Old Bazaar in Prishtina

Source: IKS and European Stability Initiative (ESI). A Future for Prishtina's Past.

Prishtina: IKS / ESI, 2006.

https://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_future_of_pristina%20booklet.pdf<https://>

Abstract

This article examines the destruction and marginalization of Ottoman urban space in Prishtina, Kosovo, during socialist Yugoslavia as a politics of heritage in the process of urban modernization. Focusing on the demolition of the Old Bazaar, the reconfiguration of the historic core, the displacement of fountains, streets, and traditional housing, and the construction of socialist administrative space, the article argues that de-Ottomanization operated through a dual process of material removal and symbolic reclassification. Modernization made Ottoman urban forms appear obsolete, disorderly, and premodern, while new administrative squares, widened roads, and institutional buildings staged the legitimacy of the socialist state. Prishtina is a revealing case as a socialist urbanism did not simply erase Ottoman heritage; it fragmented, isolated selected monuments from their urban context, and transformed absence itself into a carrier of political meaning. The article concludes that de-Ottomanization in Prishtina should be understood as a cumulative spatial practice in which heritage was destroyed, selectively authorized, and repeatedly reinterpreted to produce political legitimacy.

Keywords: Prishtina; Kosovo; socialist urbanism; heritage politics; urban memory.

Introduction

Heritage is not only a record of what societies inherit. It is a political language through which institutions, states, communities, and competing publics decide which pasts will be made visible, which will be tolerated as fragments, and which will be displaced from the everyday city. The politics of heritage is therefore inseparable from the politics of space. Streets, bazaars, squares, fountains, monuments, religious buildings, administrative centers, and urban plans do not merely reflect identity after the fact; they participate in producing identity by arranging bodies, memories, and symbols in space. This is especially evident in post-imperial and socialist contexts, where political authority often seeks legitimacy by reorganizing the material environment and staging a break with an earlier order.

The Balkans provide a particularly important setting for studying this process because the region's cities contain the sedimented traces of multiple empires, state formations, religious traditions, and ideological projects. The Ottoman past is among the most politically charged of these inheritances. In different contexts, Ottoman urban forms have been interpreted as evidence of imperial domination, Islamic continuity, shared urban culture, multicultural coexistence, Balkan vernacular tradition, or an unwanted sign of backwardness. Because of this ambiguity, Ottoman-era heritage is frequently subjected to selective preservation, destruction, neglect, touristic rebranding, or national appropriation (Bryce & Čaušević, 2019; Hajdarpašić, 2008; Hartmuth, 2008; Marinov, 2017).

The transformation of Prishtina has been examined through several overlapping scholarly perspectives. Studies of socialist urbanism emphasize the city's rapid modernization after 1945, highlighting how Yugoslav planning policies reshaped Prishtina from an Ottoman provincial town into a modern administrative and cultural center (Navakazi & Jerliu, 2018; Gjinolli, 2019). Some scholars continued to interpret these changes as part of a broader process of unfinished urbanization, arguing that socialist development fundamentally altered the city's morphology while leaving many planning ambitions unrealized (Jerliu, 2023). Research on architecture and urban governance further demonstrates how modernization projects sought to replace inherited Ottoman spatial structures with symbols of progress, modernity, and socialist identity (Jashari-Kajtazi, 2016; Pula, 2023). A related body of scholarship examines urban space through the lens of identity politics, showing how street names, monuments, public

squares, and linguistic landscapes have been used to construct competing national narratives in both socialist and post-socialist periods (Demaj, 2023a; Demaj, 2023b; Stiperski & Ejupi, 2024). While these studies provide important insights into modernization, nationalism, and urban transformation, they tend to treat the diminishing visibility of Ottoman heritage as a consequence of broader political or developmental processes. Less attention has been paid to de-Ottomanization as a distinct spatial phenomenon operating through multiple mechanisms, including demolition, neglect, marginalization, symbolic substitution, and selective heritage revival. Building on broader scholarship on Ottoman heritage in the Balkans (Hartmuth, 2008; Mattioli, 2014) this article argues that Prishtina illustrates how de-Ottomanization should be understood not as a singular episode of heritage loss but as a cumulative and ongoing process through which Ottoman urban legacies are continuously reconfigured, displaced, and selectively reinterpreted across successive political regimes.

Existing discussions of de-Ottomanization have primarily focused on the removal of Ottoman monuments, the nationalization of urban space, or the symbolic distancing of Balkan societies from their Ottoman past (Hartmuth, 2006; Hartmuth, 2008; Hajdarpašić, 2008; Lory, 2015). In studies of Balkan cities such as Skopje, de-Ottomanization has been associated with heritage destruction and the production of new national narratives through urban redevelopment (Mattioli, 2014). However, the concept remains undertheorized as a long-term spatial process. The case of Prishtina suggests that Ottoman heritage can be marginalized not only through physical erasure but also through isolation from everyday urban life, unequal conservation practices, changing symbolic hierarchies, and selective forms of restoration that preserve individual monuments while disconnecting them from their historical urban context.

This article tries to explore the destruction of Ottoman urban space in Prishtina during socialist Yugoslavia as a process of de-Ottomanization. The central argument is that socialist modernization in Prishtina should not be read only as technical improvement, urban growth, or architectural modernization. It also operated as a politics of heritage in which the Ottoman city was materially dismantled and symbolically reclassified as obsolete, disorderly, and incompatible with the spatial image of a modern socialist capital. The demolition of the Old Bazaar, the reconfiguration of the historic center, the decline of public fountains, the marginalization of traditional housing created

a new spatial hierarchy while the socialist state occupied the center as the agent of progress, and Ottoman urban memory became residual, fragmented, or invisible.

The article does not claim that every redevelopment decision was motivated by a single anti-Ottoman ideology in socialist period. Prishtina was also shaped by population growth, administrative expansion, infrastructure needs, planning doctrines, and the wider Yugoslav project of modernization. However, the location, symbolism, and cumulative effects of the interventions matter. When the historic commercial core is demolished, when public infrastructure associated with Ottoman urban life is allowed to disappear and when administrative space replaces the bazaar as the city's symbolic center, modernization becomes a technique of memory politics. The key question is therefore not whether Prishtina was modernized, but how modernization changed the status of Ottoman heritage in the public city. The article tries to follow the guiding research question of how did socialist-era urban transformation in Prishtina destroy, marginalize, and reclassify Ottoman urban space, and what does this reveal about heritage, legitimacy, and memory politics in post-imperial Balkan cities? A secondary question asks how later post-war forms of monumentalization interacted with this socialist inheritance. The article answers these questions through a qualitative case-study approach that combines critical literature review and reading of urban space. Its contribution is to show that de-Ottomanization is not only disappearance. It is a cumulative spatial practice that works through erasure, neglect, isolation, symbolic substitution, and later selective revival.

Theoretical Framework

Critical heritage studies challenge the idea that heritage is a passive collection of inherited objects. Heritage is an active process of selection, valuation, authorization, and exclusion. Crouch and Parker (2003) connect heritage practices to the production of place and social meaning, while Graham et al. (2016) emphasize that heritage is often dissonant because it privileges some memories while marginalizing others. A site becomes heritage not simply because it is old, but because institutions and communities authorize it as meaningful. Conversely, a site can be excluded from heritage not only through demolition, but also through neglect, underfunding, isolation, and interpretive silence.

This perspective is essential for reading Prishtina because the most important socialist interventions did not merely replace old buildings with new ones. They changed

the rules by which the city's past could be publicly recognized. The Old Bazaar had functioned as a spatial system of commerce, craft, sociability, and memory; after demolition, its meaning could survive only through fragments, photographs, and the survival of isolated religious or architectural elements. Heritage politics therefore operates through absence as well as presence. A missing bazaar, a lost fountain, or a renamed street may reveal as much about memory politics as a protected monument.

Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the production of space is useful because it treats space as a social product rather than a neutral container. Urban space is formed through the interaction of spatial practices, representations of space, and lived experience. Planning maps, administrative narratives, building projects, and daily movements are all part of this production. From this perspective, the socialist redesign of Prishtina's center was not merely a change in physical form. It was a transformation in the representation and use of space, the compact Ottoman commercial city gave way to the administrative and infrastructural space of the socialist state.

The concept of de-Ottomanization names this selective distancing from the Ottoman past. In Balkan scholarship, the term does not refer to a single uniform policy, but to a range of practices through which Ottoman legacies are removed, reinterpreted, or nationalized (Hajdarpašić, 2008; Hartmuth, 2006, 2008). Marinov (2017) explains that the so-called Balkan house could be interpreted either as Ottoman inheritance or as authentic national vernacular depending on political context. Mattioli's (2014) study of Skopje similarly demonstrates how Ottoman heritage may be preserved only under limited conditions that maintain ethnic or spatial boundaries that will be also depending on political necessity.

Modernization is therefore not outside heritage politics. Harvey's (2005) reading of modernity as a myth of rupture is relevant due to modernizing regimes frequently claim to break with the past while also depending on that past as a negative image. Socialist urbanism in Yugoslavia often promised development, equality and new social relations, but in cities with Ottoman morphology it also confronted inherited spatial forms that could be framed as inadequate for the new society. In Prishtina, the Ottoman city became the background against which socialist modernity staged its own legitimacy.

Methodology and Case Selection

This article uses a qualitative case-study method focused on Prishtina. The method combines a critical review of scholarship on heritage, Balkan de-Ottomanization, socialist urbanism, and Prishtina's urban development by employing a qualitative research design based on interpretive analysis of secondary sources. It focuses on the transformation of Ottoman urban heritage in Prishtina through a close reading of existing scholarly literature, urban studies of selected urban transformations. The analysis is not a comprehensive architectural inventory. Rather, it examines transformations repeatedly identified in the literature as central to the city's twentieth-century restructuring: the demolition of the Old Bazaar, the construction of socialist administrative space, the reconfiguration of streets and public spaces, and the marginalization of fountains and traditional urban fabric (Drançolli, 2023; Herscher, 2007; Jerliu, 2023; Jerliu & Navakazi, 2018).

The selection of materials was guided by their relevance to the historical and spatial transformation of Prishtina, particularly works addressing socialist modernization, post-socialist urban change, and heritage politics. Priority was given to sources that explicitly discuss Ottoman-era urban elements and their subsequent reinterpretation, modification, or disappearance in the urban landscape.

The selection of the city as a case concentrates several transitions in one urban landscape as an Ottoman urban center, a provincial city transformed under socialist Yugoslavia and later the capital of post-war Kosovo. Each phase produced new spatial claims. The socialist period is the focus of this article because it was then that the Ottoman centered morphology of the city was most radically dismantled. The post-war period is discussed more briefly as a later layer of memory politics that did not undo socialist de-Ottomanization but added new symbols of Albanian national memory, Kosovar statehood, and pro-Western orientation (Hoxha et al., 2014; Nientied & Aliaj, 2018).

Prishtina Before Socialist Transformation

Before the major socialist transformations of the twentieth century, Prishtina contained many features associated with Ottoman urbanism. Its historic structure was organized around the Old Bazaar and a network of neighborhoods shaped by commercial, religious, residential, and social functions. The bazaar was more than a market. It was a dense urban system in which craft production, exchange, everyday sociability, religious institutions,

and local memory intersected. Mosques, fountains, narrow streets, houses, and neighborhood relations formed an urban fabric in which social life was spatially embedded.

Such spaces are easy to undervalue when heritage is understood only as monumental architecture. A mosque or a single historic building can be isolated and protected, but the bazaar's significance lay in relationships among buildings, routes, trades, public practices, and memory. The same is true of fountains. Public drinking fountains were modest elements of the streetscape, but they connected Islamic charitable practice, neighborhood sociability, and everyday access to water. Their significance was not only architectural; it was social and ritual. When these small elements disappear, the loss is not merely aesthetic. It is the loss of a micro-infrastructure through which Ottoman urban culture was reproduced.

Prishtina's Ottoman urban fabric also complicates the distinction between heritage and ordinary life. Much of what mattered was not monumental in the conventional sense. Traditional houses, craft streets, fountains, and compact routes formed the texture of everyday urban memory. For this reason, de-Ottomanization could proceed even when selected monuments survived. The survival of a mosque or one protected fountain does not preserve the urban system that once gave these elements their everyday meaning.

Socialist Destruction as Spatial Politics

After the Second World War, Prishtina became part of a socialist Yugoslav order that sought to transform social relations, economic structures, and urban space. This transformation intensified as the city acquired greater administrative importance within Kosovo. Socialist modernization brought housing, institutions, infrastructure, and new planning practices. At the same time, it rebuilt the city away from the Ottoman commercial core toward a new administrative and ideological center. Jerliu and Navakazi (2018) describe this process as the socialist modernization of Prishtina, while Jerliu's later work emphasizes that massive demolitions were carried out under the pretext of modernization and targeted symbolically significant sites of the premodern city. The de-Ottomanization of Prishtina formerly which was a significant regional centre and administrative role within the Ottoman Empire, Kosovo Vilayet between 1878 and 1888 entailed not only a transition toward Europeanization and modernization, but also a

process of Yugoslavization. This imposed or promoted Yugoslav identity was contested by Kosovo's Albanian population in the aftermath of the Second World War (Jerliu, 2023).

The socialist destruction of Ottoman space in Prishtina can be understood through four connected mechanisms: demolition, replacement, neglect, and reclassification. Demolition removed key elements of the Ottoman urban fabric, most notably the Old Bazaar. Replacement inserted administrative, infrastructural, and residential forms that embodied socialist modernity and shifted the symbolic center of the city away from its Ottoman commercial core (Herscher, 2007; Jerliu & Navakazi, 2018; Jerliu, 2023). Neglect allowed smaller elements, such as fountains, traditional houses, and neighborhood-scale Ottoman features, to deteriorate or disappear (Jerliu & Navakazi, 2018). Reclassification changed how Ottoman space was publicly understood; not as living urban heritage, but as backward, fragmented, inefficient, or incompatible with the modern socialist city (Hartmuth, 2008; Harvey, 2005; Jerliu, 2023).

These mechanisms gave modernization a political function. By remaking the city center, the socialist state made itself visible as the author of progress. The new city was not only planned; it was pedagogical. It taught residents to see the socialist state as modern, rational, developmental, and secular. The Ottoman city, by contrast, became a negative reference point. It was the old order from which the new city claimed to emerge.

The destruction of the Old Bazaar was the decisive moment in Prishtina's socialist de-Ottomanization. Bazaars in Ottoman Balkan cities were not simply commercial facilities. They organized daily life, craft economies, social exchange, religious endowment, and urban identity. Their destruction therefore removed both a material environment and a social structure of memory. Drançolli (2023) situates the destruction of old bazaars in Kosovo within a broader process of modernization that treated historic commercial cores as obstacles to the new city. Herscher (2007) likewise argues that urban destruction in Kosovo cannot be separated from urbanism itself, because planning and violence have both participated in the remaking of the city.

In Prishtina, the bazaar's destruction replaced an Ottoman-centered order of circulation with a socialist-centered order of administration and display. The bazaar was a space of small-scale exchange, craft, religious adjacency, and everyday sociability. The new center emphasized state institutions, open squares, widened streets, and the visibility of public authority. This was not a simple exchange of old for new. It was a change in the symbolic grammar of the city.

Administrative Space and ‘Brotherhood and Unity’

The construction of socialist administrative space in Prishtina gave architectural form to the Yugoslav ideology of modernization and interethnic unity. Brotherhood and Unity Square and surrounding state buildings materialized a new political center. The name itself performed ideological work. It invoked the Yugoslav principle of interethnic coexistence while placing the socialist state at the center of urban visibility. The square replaced the density and informality of the old commercial core with an open and official space organized around institutions.

This transformation can be read through Lefebvre’s (1991) triad of spatial production. In representations of space, planners imagined a modern socialist capital with institutions, traffic capacity, and administrative order. In spatial practice, residents encountered new routes, squares, and buildings that reorganized movement and visibility. In lived space, the older memory of the bazaar persisted as absence, nostalgia, or residual attachment. The socialist square thus did not erase memory completely. It displaced memory while creating a new authorized narrative of the city.

De-Ottomanization also occurred through smaller and less spectacular interventions. The widening of streets, the extension of modern circulation systems, and the transformation of older promenades altered the spatial scale of the city. Ottoman urbanism often depended on compact streets, pedestrian rhythms, and neighborhood-based orientation. Socialist planning privileged wider roads, administrative axes, and infrastructural legibility. The result was not only physical modernization, but a change in how the city could be experienced and remembered.

Public fountains demonstrate the everyday dimension of loss. Jerliu and Navakazi (2018) note that more than forty public drinking fountains once shaped Ottoman Prishtina’s public realm, while only one survives under legal protection near the Bazaar Mosque. Traditional housing and neighborhood ensembles were similarly vulnerable. The large-scale and continuous reconfiguration of the urban plan was further shaped by the construction of typical socialist apartment blocks, alongside the extension and widening of streets. These interventions also transformed the Ottoman-style promenade known as Divan Yoll during the 1960s. The destruction of the bazaar was particularly significant, as it erased a spatial form through which Ottoman-era memory had been embedded in everyday life. Bazaars were not merely collections of buildings, but complex urban systems of circulation, sociability, craft, and memory. Moreover, architectural

structures that were already in poor condition at the time the protected area was designated soon began to deteriorate further. This process intensified from 1975 onwards. These plans were designed not only to implement new housing policies, but also to promote the redevelopment of what was perceived as the underdeveloped Ottoman-style neighbourhood of the Tophane district (Navakazi & Jerliu, 2018).

Socialist modernization in Prishtina was also unfinished and fragmented. Jerliu (2023) characterizes socialist Prishtina as a story of unfinished urbanization, in which planning strategies and interventions produced fragmentation rather than a coherent modern city. This incompleteness matters analytically. De-Ottomanization did not result in a perfectly realized socialist capital. Instead, it produced a city in which demolished Ottoman spaces, new modernist fragments, incomplete plans, and later post-socialist developments coexisted uneasily.

Because socialist urbanization remained incomplete, the Ottoman past was not fully erased. It survived as memory, absence, fragment, and religious practice. Some mosques remained, certain routes and names persisted in memory, and the loss of the bazaar became part of the city's historical consciousness. The new becoming city therefore created dissonance rather than silence as Graham et al. (2016) define heritage as dissonant because the same past can sustain conflicting claims.

This ambiguity distinguishes de-Ottomanization from simple destruction. Destruction removes material form, but it may also intensify memory by creating absence. The demolished bazaar becomes meaningful precisely because it is no longer there. The missing fountains point to a lost public culture. The fragmented mosque or protected building becomes a sign of a wider urban system that has vanished. Socialist modernity thus produced its own ghosts.

Post-Socialist and Post-War Reinscription

The post-socialist and post-war period did not reverse socialist de-Ottomanization. Instead, it introduced a new symbolic layer. After the Kosovo War, public space in Prishtina became a site for marking sovereignty, commemorating resistance, and expressing international alignment. Hoxha et al. (2014) show that national identity and political pressure significantly affected planners' perceptions and intentions in post-war Prishtina. Skanderbeg Square, Zahir Pajaziti Square, Ibrahim Rugova Square, and Bill Clinton Boulevard are examples of how public space became a text of Albanian national

memory, Kosovo's liberation struggle, political leadership, and gratitude to Western allies.

These post-war symbols are important because they reveal that de-Ottomanization is not only socialist or secular. The dominant public symbolism of post-war Prishtina often emphasizes Albanian historical continuity, liberation, statehood, European belonging, and transatlantic alliance. Ottoman heritage does not return to the center of official identity in a straightforward way. It remains present through mosques, protected fragments, religious practice, tourism, and scholarly debate, but the main monumental grammar of the capital is not Ottoman. Nientied and Aliaj (2018) similarly argue that central squares in Balkan capitals are key sites where new political elites search for identity through symbolism.

The post-war layer also changes the meaning of socialist space. Some socialist-era spaces are reinterpreted, renamed, or overwritten by new ceremonies and monuments. Others persist as background infrastructure. The result is a memoryscape in which various past narratives coexist unequally. The city does not tell a unique heritage story. It distributes different stories across space, granting some official prominence while leaving others in fragments or absences.

Conclusion

The case of Prishtina claims that de-Ottomanization is best understood as heritage politics rather than simple disappearance. It operates through a sequence of decisions about what may remain, what must be removed, what can be renamed, and what will be allowed to decay. In the socialist period, Ottoman space was not only physically destroyed; it was converted into a sign of the past that socialist modernization claimed to overcome. This conversion made demolition appear progressive.

The first major insight is that modernization narratives require critical reading in urban planning. Modernization often presents itself as technical, necessary, and future-oriented. In Prishtina, however, modernization carried symbolic judgments about the old Ottoman city. Narrow streets, bazaars, fountains, and traditional houses were not merely old; but also a so-called signification of backwardness in contrast to socialist planning, administrative rationality, and the promise of development. Prishtina's Ottoman heritage survives partly as absence, and this absence is politically charged because it reveals the spatial priorities of socialist modernization.

Finally, Prishtina demonstrates that identity formation is spatially cumulative. New symbols do not appear on a blank surface. They are inserted into a city already structured by Ottoman traces, socialist demolitions, Yugoslav administrative space, wartime memory, international intervention, and contemporary development. Heritage politics is therefore a politics of sedimentation. Meanings accumulate, conflict, and are selectively activated over time.

It was a politics of heritage through which the Ottoman city was materially dismantled, symbolically reclassified, and replaced by a new spatial order centered on socialist administrative legitimacy. The demolition of the Old Bazaar, the decline of fountains, the marginalization of traditional housing, and the construction of new institutional spaces transformed the relationship between memory and urban form.

The concept of de-Ottomanization helps explain this transformation, but only if it is understood broadly. De-Ottomanization in Prishtina did not mean the complete disappearance of the Ottoman past. It meant the fragmentation of that past, the isolation of selected remains, the disappearance of everyday urban infrastructures. It is a result of a power in which political order is made visible through the built environment.

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Uncharted Paths: Children, Art, and the Way of Remembering Urkun 1916

Aigerim Muratova



Caption: Children's Collaborative Drawing During the Lesson Activity

Source: Photograph from the author's archive

Abstract

This article examines how schoolchildren, as members of Kyrgyzstan's emerging generation, relate to and comprehend the tragic events of Urkun in 1916 through the lens of art practices. Despite its growing presence in public discussions as a painful historical event, schoolchildren's perception of it remains ambiguous and fragmented, largely determined by the sources that inform their understanding of this part of social tension. The author of the paper, PhD student Aigerim Muratova, conducted research for her MA thesis "The Promise of Memory: Urkun of 1916, Collective Memory, and Transmission of Family Heritage." Based on family ethnography and her informants, she organized a memory class with high school students and an art workshop, analyzing how the memory of Urkun is transmitted not only through textbooks but also through oral histories they hear, or even silence in collective memory. Urkun is not only a moment in history but also a symbol of imperial violence, epistemological repression, and struggle for voice. Through creativity and dialogue, schoolchildren participated in the creation of alternative narratives. The article demonstrates that collective memory of Urkun is embodied as a living cultural process, where young people play a vital role and art offers a gentle method for processing traumatic history and sustaining intergenerational dialogue.

Keywords: Collective Memory, Urkun, 1916, uprising, reflection.

Introduction

The collective memory of violence and trauma is not simply a reflection of the past, but an active process through which society shapes its identity, political positions, and notions of justice. The Urkun of 1916 is one of the defining moments of collective grief and a sensitive chapter in the history of Central Asia, leaving a deep imprint on the collective memory of the Kyrgyz people. However, for decades, this event was silenced, distorted, or instrumentalized within imperial and Soviet narratives.

Today, amid the post-Soviet decolonization of historical consciousness, interest in Urkun is reviving - especially among the younger generation, which is seeking new ways to understand the past. Young people are becoming not only consumers of memory but also its active creators: through family stories, digital platforms, artistic practices, and political activism.

This article aims to explore how children, representatives of the young generation in Kyrgyzstan, interpret the Urkun tragedy during a school open-ended lesson. By analyzing their visual and verbal responses (art posters, statements, choice of symbolic images), we seek to understand how collective memory is transformed, which elements of the past are preserved and which are reinterpreted, and the role of the educational environment in this process.

Methodologically, the study draws on observation of an open-ended lessons in one of the schools in Bishkek¹, working with two classes that differ in age, as well as an analysis of children's creative work. If viewed through the lens of Halbwachs's theory of collective memory, it can be understood not merely as a pedagogical exercise but as a ritualized space where historical narratives are reproduced, reinterpreted, and emotionally internalized.

This article aims to analyze how young people perceive and reinterpret the memory of 1916. By focusing on the perspectives of the younger generation, the research investigates how it is remembered, narrated, and emotionally processed in contemporary contexts such as education, family discourse, and cultural expression. The purpose is to understand how historical collective memory is not only preserved but also transformed

¹ Bishkek is the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan)

through intergenerational transmission, and how schoolchildren contribute to the ongoing reconstruction of national narratives.

In doing so, the article also engages with the broader project of decolonizing knowledge, where educational memory practices can be understood as part of broader decolonizing processes. In the context of Urkun, memory classes allow youth to engage with history not as a fixed, state-sanctioned account, but as a lived and contested experience.

Echoes of 1916

Historical overview

110 years ago, a moment of historical collective suffering took place in the Turkestan region². One part of that went down in the history of the Kyrgyz people as “Urkun”³ - a mass uprising and flight of the population, primarily the Kyrgyz, from the repressions of the detachments of the Russian Empire. The territory now known as Kyrgyzstan was partially included in the Semirechye⁴ of the Russian Empire, which was part of the Turkestan region. Following the Russian-Kokand War in 1876 and the subsequent dissolution of the Kokand Khanate, the territory was incorporated into the Turkestan Governorate-General. However, the beginning of the 20th century was a period of social upheavals for the Russian Empire, which ultimately led to the collapse of the tsarist regime itself. First came the revolution of 1905-1907, followed by the beginning of the First World War, the national liberation movement of 1916, and then the February and

² "Turkestan" is a historical region in Central Asia that is now divided among several modern countries. Today, it includes the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

³ Originally the word in Kyrgyz language “Үркүн” (pronounced as “Ürkün”), is a part of the uprising in 1916 which happened in Turkestan, stands as a pivotal and dark chapter in Kyrgyz history. The etymology of the word is related to the concept of “mass flight”. Meanwhile, the term, “Urkun” can be found in the Kyrgyz-russian dictionary of K.K. Yudakhin (1965) in two meanings: first as a “confusion”, “disarray” or “mass disorderly flight” (this is what by calling it brutally suppressed Kyrgyz uprising and the flight to China through the mountains). At that time, the verb “urk” in the same dictionary (pronounced as “ürk”, originally in Kyrgyz: “үрк”) means “fear”.

⁴ Semirechye as a region, is an administrative unit in the times of the Russian Empire, Soviet Russia and the USSR. The administrative center is in the city - Vernyi. In 1922-1924 it was called Dzhetyssay region. Counties of Semirechye region: Vernenskiy County, Dzhetysay County, Kopalskiy County, Lepsinskiy County (Sergiopolskiy), Pishpekskiy County (Now: Chui region of Kyrgyzstan, with capital Bishkek), Przhevalski County (Now: Issyk-Kul region, with capital Karakol).

October revolutions of 1917, which led to the fall of the Tsarist Empire and became a key historical event that led to the formation of the Soviet Union⁵.

An objective and truthful assessment of Urkun is hampered by the burden of political and ideological attitudes that researchers have inherited from the past. Any mass manifestation of popular discontent, which includes the events of 1916, has not one but a number of causes, which together led to tragic consequences.

The uprising in Semirechye was the result of a whole complex of internal and external causes, which together led to a painful chapter of violent upheaval. During the Soviet period, only some of them were considered: the predatory nature of the land policy of Tsarism, the unbearable colonial and feudal oppression, and the lack of rights of the poor strata of the population, which was intensified by the outbreak of World War I. A taboo was imposed on considering other causes of the uprising, such as external intervention, betrayal in the highest echelons of power at the center and in the regions, provocations and instigation by foreign agents, Russian military personnel, officials of the imperial and native administration, the opium factor, and others. Without studying the entire complex of causes, it is difficult to restore an objective picture of the events. (Madzhun, 2016)

In Isakeev's B.⁶ report four main reasons for the 1916 uprising were indicated, namely: "unlimited exploitation and unbearable colonial oppression, especially on the

⁵ The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or commonly known as the Soviet Union: "The U.S.S.R. was the successor to the Russian Empire of the tsars. Following the 1917 Revolution, four socialist republics were established on the territory of the former empire: the Russian and Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republics and the Ukrainian and Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republics. On December 30, 1922, these constituent republics established the U.S.S.R. Additional union republics (Soviet Socialist Republics) were set up in subsequent years: the Turkmen and Uzbek S.S.R.'s in 1924, the Tadzhik S.S.R. in 1929, and the Kazakh and Kirgiz S.S.R.'s in 1936." (Conquest, R. et al., 2025) With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the Russian Federation became the successor state of the USSR. Collapse of the Soviet Union, sequence of events that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 31, 1991. The former superpower was replaced by 15 independent countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica., 2025)

⁶ Bayaly Isakeev (1897–1938) – statesman, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1916, as a 19-year-old young man, he took part in the national liberation uprising (Urkun). After the suppression of the uprising, he was forced to flee to China (Xinjiang), where he was in exile until 1917. Later, he became one of the key builders of the Kyrgyz statehood and wrote the historical work "The Kyrgyz Uprising of 1916." ("Киргизское восстание 1916 года", Киргосиздат, 1932)

part of the tsarist government; merciless and brutal exploitation of workers by the Bai-Manap⁷ feudal-patriarchal elements of the Kyrgyz people themselves; imperialist war; recruitment of workers for rear work.” (Kakeev, 2016) In 1991, Academician Tabyshaliev S.⁸ noted: “Today, we are, in fact, re-approaching the study of the problem of the 1916 uprising in Kyrgyzstan and its consequences.” These words, spoken in 1991, can, unfortunately, be repeated today. (as cited in Kakeev, 2016, p.8) Therefore, there are still discussions among historians and researchers in general, about how much one can trust colonial archival documents, which undoubtedly, the sources of that period are very valuable, moreover, they are the only ones of their kind for restoring the picture of past events, at the same time it is necessary to understand that they cannot be taken completely on faith and here it is important how we interpret these sources.

Theoretical framework

Memory of tragic past events is not only a historical fact but also a living cultural process that shapes identity, values, and collective consciousness. Urkun of 1916, when the Kyrgyz people experienced a mass flight and devastating casualties. This event remains a deeply painful yet largely silenced trauma in the history of Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. Although interest in the Urkun topic has increased in recent decades, particularly in academic and public circles, the question of how this event is perceived by new generations remains open.

In this part, a theoretical framework serves as a basis for analyzing the mechanisms of collective memory formation regarding the events of Urkun in 1916. It

⁷ Bai-Manap (originally in Kyrgyz «бай-манап») - is a representative of the privileged feudal class among the Kyrgyz. “The ‘manap’ essentially organized the life of the entire clan. He determined the nomadic routes and times of migration, oversaw court proceedings, negotiated agreements with other clans, and conducted communications with the government institutions of the state under whose rule the Kyrgyz were currently governed. A ‘manap’ almost never had personal property, for the entire clan's property was at his disposal. A number of historians (Bartold, Baron Meyendorff, General Grodekov, and others) depict “manaps” as active organizers of clan life.” (<https://foto.kg/galereya/987-manapstvo-bay-v-nacionalnoy-odezhde.html>)

⁸ Salmorbek Tabyshaliev (1928–1993) was a prominent Soviet Kyrgyz historian, academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Kirghiz SSR (elected 1989), and public figure. A specialist in 20th-century Kyrgyz history, he served as the Rector of Kyrgyz State University from 1960 to 1977 and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Kirghiz SSR from 1975 to 1980.

allows for the interpretation of empirical data through the prism of collective memory and the process from stigma to dialogue of historical consciousness.

As outlined by Halbwachs (2007), memory is not only a part of an individual's recollection but a socially conditioned process involving a person's family, community, nation, and other collective groups. . Halbwachs argues that it is through social frameworks that we recall, interpret, and transmit the past. Collective memory, according to him, is key to a society's identity. In proposing this concept, he proceeds from the premise that memory operates on two interconnected levels: the individual and the collective. Rather than treating these as separate, independent systems, he demonstrates that even individual memory is fundamentally socially constituted. While a person's memories are experienced within the boundaries of their personal life, individuals always remember as members of a group, utilizing shared social frameworks to reconstruct the past. Consequently, these two levels of memory constantly intersect, and individual memory relies on the collective for structure, language, and meaning. When personal recollections are fully integrated into the group narrative, they are transformed, illustrating that individual consciousness cannot be fully separated from its social context.

In the context of the Urkun, the mass flight and death of thousands of Kyrgyz as a result of an uprising against the Tsarist detachments, Halbwachs's theory allows us to view this event not only as a historical occurrence but as a living trauma transmitted across generations. The memory of that period is preserved through oral histories, family histories, cultural practices, and rituals within the community, shaping the collective identity of the Kyrgyz people. This is not simply a recollection of a calamity, but socially constructed knowledge that influences contemporary perceptions of history, justice, and national identity.

This implies that Halbwachs's approach helps to understand how Urkun functions as an element of collective memory, where not only the facts are important, but also how they are experienced, transmitted, and interpreted within the community.

Empirical findings

Each generation rediscovers the events of the past, rethinking them and fitting them into its own historical context. Before conducting the lesson with schoolchildren, I spent some time communicating and further working with one family, whose members became my primary informants. They were a multigenerational family in which the memory of Urkun was preserved not only through official sources but through oral histories and personal memories. It was the family that I observed how the intergenerational transmission of their ancestor experiences occurs, not as a set of facts, but as emotionally charged knowledge.

Conversations with them became the starting point of another chapter in my research. One of them said to me,

"Each generation has its own challenges"

and this phrase became the driving force behind bringing the subject of 1916 into the classroom, where it could be explored together with the students.

I want to draw attention to how working closely with informants proved not only a source of knowledge about the "process" of particular family memory transmission but also an important social resource. These personal connections opened the door to direct collaboration with teachers and classroom activities. One of the family members I worked with introduced me to teachers as a starting point for dialogue and was willing to support the idea of holding an open lesson about Urkun. I decided to explore how children, without direct contact with this memory, could engage in dialogue with it. Thus arose the concept of an open lesson in which children became not just listeners but active participants in the process of understanding and visualizing the Urkun memory.

Thus, the study began with family ethnography, then observing the transmission of memory within the family, and then moved into the educational environment, where the memory of Urkun took on new forms: through children's voices, images they draw, and symbols.

Open lesson as an anthropological field

Educational institutions play a key role in shaping historical consciousness, especially in the context of collective memories such as Urkun. School is not only a place for the transmission of knowledge but also a cultural space where narratives of the past are reproduced, interpreted, and transformed into a resource for personal and collective

development. Through curricula, pedagogical practices, and intergenerational interaction, the school becomes an arena in which memory takes on new forms and meanings.

A school lesson, especially one dedicated to such historical happenings as Urkun, can function as a ritual of remembrance. Such a lesson creates a special atmosphere in which children not only learn facts but also become emotionally engaged in the process of understanding. Since the school lesson lasted 40 minutes, it was important for us (teachers and me) to discuss in advance what I planned to do to make the lesson interesting and as productive as possible. We predicted that there would not be enough time to communicate with each student individually, so I chose to experiment with creating an artwork, a format that would allow them to express their thoughts, emotions, and impressions in visual and textual form. And what is important is to spend time with children in an entertaining way.

Ritualism manifests itself in symbolic actions: active communication between groupmates, poster art creation, group work - which allow children to touch upon memory without being its bearers.

The structure of the lesson included an introduction with a brief account of the historical events of 1916, and the importance of remembering. Next was my part, viewing of visual representation in monuments, last materials (photographs, maps) on the theme, a group discussion (if someone has a question), and a creative assignment - creating art posters reflecting their personal perception of the topic.

After the Teacher's introduction, in which she describes historical moments and their influence on society, it was my turn to lead the lesson. While preparing the open lesson, I carefully approached the presentation of information about the Urkun tragedy. My previous experience working with my youngest informant, whom I interviewed, told me that her classmate felt unwell after discussing the concentration camp in class. This incident served as a reminder to me of the need to adhere to ethical principles when working with children.

Therefore, I approached sharing the details selectively and thoughtfully, avoiding overloading them with emotionally difficult content. The lesson was structured to create a space for gentle contact with memory - through memorial monuments, art installations, and questions, rather than through direct reproduction of pain. Everything took place

under the sensitive supervision of the teachers, who supported the children and helped me in general.

This balance between research interest and concern for the child's psyche became both the most exciting and most important aspect of my fieldwork. It showed that memory can be transmitted not through trauma, but through gentle touch, through respect for the age, sensitivity, and inner world of the child.

As for my side, that open lesson on the topic of Urkun became not only a pedagogical event but also a unique anthropological field - a space where I could observe how children engage with this theme, make sense of it, and express it through accessible forms as art practice. The lesson was structured around dialogue and creative exchange, allowing participants to both comprehend the information and connect with the artistic process.

The questions raised ranged from historical ("What do you understand about Urkun today?") to existential: "What is it for you?", "How can you illustrate it?". I believe, these questions indicated sensitivity and a desire to understand the tragedy not only as a fact of the past, but as a human experience. I prepared materials in advance that would encourage the children's free expression. Art materials, including colored pencils, markers, and paper were provided, ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and feelings through visual forms. To foster a sense of comfort and relational trust during the session, I intentionally created a welcoming atmosphere. As part of this effort, I offered small gestures of care, such as bringing sweets, which helped cultivate a feeling of peaceful togetherness and emotional ease among participants.

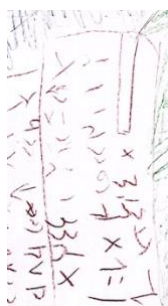
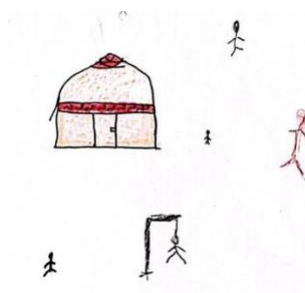
Although the two 8th grade classes were parallel, their behavioral dynamics were noticeably different. The first class was characterized by restraint and silence: the children worked intently, preferring individual expression through drawings and short comments. The second class, by contrast, was more expressive: I observed how the children actively discussed, shared their impressions, and responded emotionally to the topic both during my presentation and also through discussion of their groupwork.

These differences demonstrated that, even within comparable educational contexts, the dynamics of each group, the classroom environment, and the individual traits of the children play a crucial role in shaping how traumatic memory is received and interpreted. This insight became a key component of my research, underscoring the

importance of approaching memory work with adaptability, sensitivity, and a deep awareness of each classes “character”.

While accurate, this observation overlooks the multi-layered nature of how respondents interacted with the topic:

- Verbally, the children actively participated in the discussion, sharing their thoughts, sometimes even family stories heard from their grandparents.
- Visually, in their art creations⁹ [see Figures 1 and 2], they used symbolic imagery (mountains, glaciers on them, road, clouds, sun, trees), colors (black, red, blue, brown, yellow, green), or such objects (grave, «бөз үй»¹⁰, *runic signs*) and even inscription of “*Urkun*” which led to express fear, pain of leaving homeland.



- Emotionally, as a creative process, some children felt excitement and willingness to participate in groupwork. Others, on the contrary, remained on the sidelines, not showing initiative and not getting involved. It was with this part of the group that I worked especially carefully - through individual questions, gentle invitations to participate, and support in visual expression. This moment was not only a professional experience, but also a deeply personal. As a child, I was a

quiet and reserved, unaccustomed to participating in group activities. Therefore, working

⁹ An important note: the visual materials presented in this work have been digitally processed using artificial intelligence technologies. Despite the high artistic and aesthetic value of the original posters, priority was given to ensuring the privacy and digital security of the minor participants. Therefore, the work of kids has been anonymized, and the display of materials is limited to fragments that preserve the scientific value of the study without violating ethical standards for the protection of the data of my young participants.

¹⁰ Translated from Kyrgyz language: “boz uy” - the traditional Kyrgyz housing was a yurt. Yurt or Boz uy – nomad housing that is quick and easy to assemble/disassemble by one family.

with children who initially resisted participation evoked special attention and empathy in me. In that moment, I strove to create a space for them where they could feel safe and gradually find their own way to participate (whether through a drawing, a gesture, a glance, or a short word with their groupmates). This interaction became a powerful reminder of how subtly research and personal history are intertwined.

Lastly, the lessons with them became not only an educational but also a cultural and anthropological event, in which the children became active participants in the process of rethinking historical memory. It allowed me to observe how collective memory as Urkun can be perceived, processed, and expressed by a 8th school kids through their own symbolic forms.

“The story of the Great Urkun is not over”

The school itself, from the beginning, gave a special impression - a space filled with bright stands, children's drawings, and appliques that reflected important topics: most notably an explicit call to end violence, traffic rules, and also some scenes from Kyrgyz fairy tales. In one of the classes that I was passing, there were also many stands with photographs on the walls, in a particular class it was about the art of handicrafts - «саймачылык» (embroidery), «куракчылык» (carpentry), «зергерлик» (jewelry), «өрмөкчүлүк» (the art of weaving), about national costumes, revealing the richness of traditional culture. Nature was felt throughout the school - green plants, and flowers, creating coziness and harmony. An atmosphere in which you want to study, explore, and be inspired.

I was greeted by such a sign «Улуу Үркүндүн баяны бүтпөйт»¹¹ once I entered the classroom to do another classes but with higher classes – 10th grade. This phrase was posted on the screen, surrounded by hand-drawn images about Urkun. This gesture, in some ways simple yet profound: immediately set the tone for the lesson. It demonstrated that the teacher with children was already engaged in the process of remembering. This sign became a kind of invitation - not only to dialogue, but also to the sharing of experience and allow for a transmission of memory. It set the emotional rhythm of the lesson, transforming it from a formal event into a space of shared connection. For me, as a researcher, this was the moment when fieldwork acquired a human dimension: memory became not just an object of study, but a common point of contact.

¹¹ Translated from Kyrgyz language: “The story of the Great Urkun is not over”

Classroom was ready with divided areas for three groups. School kids were already there with prepared posters¹² and signs of their group on each table. All three youth-led groups not only presented the Urkun (the historical happenings itself) but also revealed different aspects of its perception: «Үркүн» (Urkun), «Үмүт» (Umut) - Hope, and «Келечек» (Kelechek) - Future.



Figure 3: Urkun's team poster



Figure 4: Umut's team poster



Figure 5: Kelechek's team poster

The first group is called «Үркүн». They focused on the history of the event, delving into details, and analyzing the causes and consequences. They revealed details about individual interpersonal experiences and social interactions. To give their words more weight, they shared books that had impact on them, for example, «Узак Жол» (Uzak Zhol) by Mukay Elebayev, «Зар Заман» (Zar zaman) by Moldo Kylych, «Кандуу Жылдар» (Kanduu Jyldar) by Aaly Tokombaev¹³.

The second group, «Үмүт» (Hope) their name speaks for itself. The schoolchildren touched on the topic of compassion, perspective, and support, considering also the role of teachers in shaping the awareness of historical events for the young generation. This

¹² An important note: in order to ensure visual and ethical safety, the original children's drawings were reworked using artificial intelligence (AI). The use of AI allowed me to preserve the idea and symbolism of the works while removing some of the recognizable elements. Same as previous creations of kids, a fragmented visualization of the participants' posters was done. Selective cropping was used to demonstrate the art project's main idea while maintaining confidentiality. The three images were created digitally, with an abstract style and neutral colors to emphasize the meaning without violating the privacy of the young artists - my young participants.

¹³ Authors who have given voice to the memory of the uprising of 1916 in Kyrgyz prose: Elebayev M. (1936) *Uzak Zhol* [The Long Road, in Kyrgyz], Kylych M. (1927) *Zar Zaman* [Age of suffering, in Kyrgyz], Tokombayev A. (1990) *Kanduu Jyldar* [Bloody Years, in Kyrgyz].

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Ушунга эзирбасам!

Ушунга тўрентимки шашо.

Ушунга-ёни напосимки мардодуш

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thoughtful engagement with historical and emotional themes: from phrases to metaphorical elements, reflecting a desire to understand the past through the lens of the contemporary perspective of the younger generation. In this matter, posters became not only creative artifacts but also a form of visual dialogue with history, in which children acted as active interpreters of memory. Urkun's team [see Figure 3] illustrated an expression of gratitude, admiration, and respect in red roses.

Three phrases there remind us about the reasons for the revolt, which led the Kyrgyz people into Urkun:

Three phrases there remind us about the reasons for the revolt, which led the Kyrgyz people into Urkun:

- 39

2. «Орус падышасы салыктын жаңы турун киргизет» - The Russian Tsar introduces a new type of tax.
3. «Аскердик кызматка жана жердин мүмкүн тартыштар» - Military service and possible land disputes.



Figure 1 «Үмүт – бул адамдарга эч калбаганда улантууга күч берген күч» - Hope is the power that gives people the strength to keep going.

Umut's team poster [see Figure 4] is quite informative. The main object in the center, the candle - is a representation of memory, sorrow, and prayers for those who passed. Upon closer inspection, the flower's petals were filled with inspirational phrases that the students chose to share with everyone - words that carried meaning and some depth. These phrases conveyed awareness, thoughtfulness, and a desire to express their point of view not just in words, but in a message that could resonate in the hearts of others.

Four phrases:

1. «Үмүт үзүлбөсүн!» - Do not lose hope!
2. «Үмүт жүрөктүн шамы» - Hope is the candle of the heart.
3. «Үмүт – бул жашоонун жандоочусу» - Hope is the essence of life.
4. «Үмүтүн канаты сынбасын!» - Don't let the wings of hope break!

Each expression became a bridge connecting the past, present, and future - knowledge, their emotions, and reflection conveyed through simple but powerful words.

Another five phrases on another side:

1. «Ата – эненин үмүтү» - Parent's hope.
2. «Биз окуган мектебибиз бизден чоң үмүт кылат» - Our school has high expectations of us.
3. «Элибиздин үмүтү» - Hope of our people.
4. «Биз жаштардан мамлекетибиз чоң үмүт кылат» - Our country has hope for youth.
5. «Келечектен биз жаштар чоң үмүт кылабыз!» - We young people have great hopes for the future!

These phrases were not just handwritten texts on a poster, but a part of their perception of history, their inner understanding of what hope, continuity and awareness of the belief into them as for the young generation mean.

Pairs of phrases illustrated in cloud form on another part of the poster:

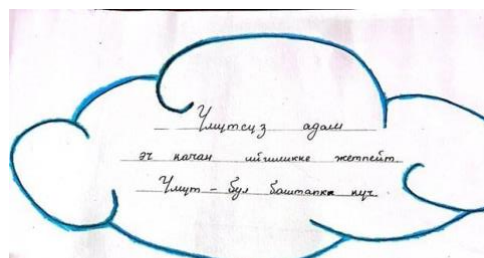


Figure 2 «Үмүтсүз адам эч качан ийгиликке жетпейт. Үмүт – бул баштанкы күч» - A person without hope never succeeds. Hope is the (main) power.

1. «Үмүтсүз адам эч качан ийгиликке жетпейт. Үмүт – бул баштанкы күч» - A person without hope never succeeds. Hope is the (main) power.
2. «Үмүт – бул адамдарга эч калбаганда улантууга күч берген күч» - Hope is the power that gives people the strength to keep going.

As previously stated, the hands of the “ancestors” in Kelechek’s poster [see Figure 5] seemed to support the world, reminding us of the connection between generations, that memory and experience live not only in stories but in the space that surrounds us. It is not shown clearly, but on the left downside corner of one of the “hands” is written the following phrase: «Үркүндөгү азап-тозок» - means “The torment of Urkun”. In this case, the new generation looks at those distant events no longer as direct eyewitnesses, but through the prism of their historical challenges, shaped by contemporary historical consciousness. Consequently, as far as the youth are concerned, they have witnessed traces of colonization. These three teams were not just organizational parts, but symbolic frameworks through which young people interacted with the past, expressed their feelings, and shaped narratives. Team “Urkun” served as a space of pain and memory, “Hope” as a gesture of resistance and restoration, and “Future” as an attempt to rethink history with new voices.

Thus, engaging children in the process of understanding the events of Urkun 1916 through the creation of posters represents an important step toward the elimination of memory stigma. In my case, it shows how we can combat stigma and normalize conversations about how art can help communities reclaim their own ways of remembering, narrating, and feeling the past. Through symbolism, collective creativity, and visual language, children became active participants in the formation of alternative forms of memory based on empathy, imagination, and cultural continuity. Such practices contribute to the restoration of broken connections between generations and open up space for a more inclusive and multi-vocal understanding of history.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken to understand how the young generation, schoolchildren, are engaged with and reflect upon the episode from the past. Through classes with them, the focus was on the cognitive and emotional responses of young participants to this historical occurrence. The creative practice was used to uncover how schoolchildren reflect upon and relate to this moment in history. This intentional use of artistic language allowed for a nuanced engagement with the past, enabling them to communicate their understanding of historical trauma in ways that transcend verbal explanation. In this context, artwork posters functioned not merely as “decoration” but as a thoughtful and affective tool for memory work and teamwork on historical interpretation.

It was and still is a part of a bigger anthropological research that was carried out with the intention of analyzing how Urkun is interpreted and transmitted through the lens of family ethnography, generational continuity, memorial activism, and visual expression of memory, where these four strands intersect.

My engagement in collective work experience with two 8th-grade classes, a 10th-grade class, and teachers, might be small, but it provides a layered portrayal of the different age groups of schoolchildren and history teachers on collective memory, decolonization of knowledge, and a reflective form of historical empathy.

Nevertheless, further investigation is required to understand how collective memories are conceptualized and implemented among younger learners. In particular, among younger pupils, whose cognitive and emotional development may shape different modes of engagement with collective memory at school. Additionally, schoolchildren often encounter distinct curricular priorities and learning environments, which may influence how memories about past happenings are introduced and cultivated. Young people play a key role in decolonizing historical consciousness, where they have a chance to engage with history not as a fixed story but as something they can question, reinterpret, and emotionally process. According to my experience, youth engagement is a long and multi-layered process. It requires not only a rethinking of historical narratives but also the creation of new forms of expression accessible and meaningful to the younger generation. They do not simply reproduce alternative versions of the past to show perception, but they gesture toward a more expansive narrative. As it was evident in the children's visual works dedicated to Urkun - through drawings filled with symbols, colors, and images, they tried to make sense of the past. It is not just about how schoolchildren

were assigned to teams named “Urkun”, “Hope”, and “Future”. Much more important is how the names themselves became entry points to a deeper understanding of historical events, collective memory, and prospects. In both cases, children conveyed fear, pain, hope, and aspirations for the future. Using visual language helped them to express what was difficult to express in words, and for me, it was a way to gain knowledge in a challenging environment. Having worked closely with them during my fieldwork time helped me to observe the progression of the learning process and creation of their own language through visual, written, and performative practices through our open classes. This process is impossible without time, trust, and a safe educational environment where critical thinking and emotional engagement become the foundation for reducing the stigma to encourage people to speak about one of the turning points in the history of Kyrgyzstan.

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RESHAPING IDENTITY AND SPACE | AZ IDENTITÁS ÉS A TÉR ÁTFORMÁLÁSA

Resistance, One Stitch at a Time: Tatreez as a Site of Identity Preservation and Reimagining in the Palestinian Experience

Farah Ghoul



Caption: Embroidering at the Arab Women's Union of Ramallah, 1930s. Credited to the Palestinian Museum (Dedman, 2016).

Source: Photograph from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress; reproduced in Dedman

Abstract

Tatreez has long functioned as a visual language through which Palestinian women narrate personal histories, collective memory, and belonging. This paper explores the historical evolution of tatreez from a localized embroidery tradition rooted in village and regional identities into a national and diasporic symbol of Palestinian identity. Drawing on scholarship concerning memory, identity formation, settler colonialism, and resistance, it argues that tatreez has continuously adapted to changing historical circumstances while preserving the collectivist foundations central to Palestinian identity. Through examining the Ottoman period, the British Mandate, the Nakba, the Intifadas, diasporic communities, and contemporary digital practices, the paper demonstrates how embroidery became a site through which Palestinians preserve memory, resist cultural erasure, and reproduce identity across generations. It further examines contemporary debates surrounding digitization, commodification, and neoliberal globalization, questioning whether modern forms of tatreez continue to sustain the historical and political integrity of the practice or risk reducing resistance to representation alone. Ultimately, the paper argues that tatreez derives its significance not from fixed motifs or static traditions, but from its capacity to continually reaffirm collective belonging, attachment to the land, and resistance to ongoing settler-colonial erasure.

Keywords: Palestine, material culture, decoloniality, post-memory, collective identity.

Introduction

Palestinian identity has been shaped through successive periods of political transformation, from Ottoman rule and the British Mandate to Zionist settler colonialism inflicting displacement, occupation, and exile.

Throughout these historical ruptures, cultural practices have played a crucial role in preserving collective memory and articulating forms of belonging that transcend political boundaries. Among the most enduring of these practices is *tatreez*, the practice of traditional Palestinian embroidery, which Palestinian women played a central role, evolving its approaches and motifs with transformations in Palestinian history.

What originated as a localized expression of village, kinship, and regional identity gradually became a national symbol of resistance, memory, and cultural continuity. Rather than remaining static, women's use of *tatreez* reflects a continuous adaptation to changing historical circumstances. Its evolution reflects not only efforts to preserve Palestinian identity but also captures ways that identity has been reimagined in response to colonialism, displacement, occupation, and diaspora.

The continuity of cultural practice becomes essential for group survival in the face of the existential threat posed by settler colonialism as demonstrated in the Zionist foundational myth that deliberately erases the Palestinian presence and identity by the framing "a land without a people for a people without a land" (Young, 2022). This paper explores the historical evolution of *tatreez* from a localized village embroidery tradition into a national and diasporic symbol of Palestinian identity. It argues that under conditions of settler colonialism, displacement, and ongoing occupation, *tatreez* has functioned not only as a means of preserving collective memory and resisting cultural erasure, but also as a site through which Palestinian identity is continuously reimagined and reproduced across changing historical contexts.

Tatreez as Regionality

Tatreez is a Levantine art of embroidery that dates back to the Canaanite era. Women of the region have used *tatreez* adorning their garments, specifically the *thobe* (a traditional dress), with these intricate motifs that exhibit a form of storytelling for the woman. The motifs narrate her personal history, and the history of her society. The *thobe* was usually inherited generationally, where each woman adds to the story of the lineage of the women in her family through embroidering new motifs onto it (Kawar, 2011). This demonstrates

Ibn Khaldoun's (1377/ 1967) term *assabiyah* (usually translated as group feeling). A collective narrative and memory reinforces solidity, where individuals begin to understand themselves as part of a longer collective and historical continuum. Ibn Khaldoun was an Arab scholar, historian, jurist, and political thinker who theorized on human social organization and civilization through travelling across al-Andalus, North Africa, and Southwest Asia (Lawrence, 2005). His significance lies partly in the fact that his theorization of social cohesion and collective belonging predates European colonial intervention and Orientalist scholarship. His work therefore provides a native Arab-Islamic framework for understanding the formation of communal identities, allowing contemporary scholars to engage with concepts of belonging and solidarity outside colonial epistemological frameworks (Alatas, 2014). This is especially significant since Ibn Khaldoun draws on the extension of *assabiyah* from kinship bond and relation to a wider tribal bond not necessarily based on kinship but one that fosters the same belonging as kinship (Ibn Khaldoun, 1377/ 1967).



Fig. 2 Bethlehem *thobe al-Malak* (bridal gown). Note. From the Palestinian Museum permanent collection, 0002.01.0082 (The Palestinian Museum, 2024)

Tatreez highlights this since the regional identity of the maker is visible in all aspects when studying the *thobe* (Ghnaim, 2024). For example, the material of the thread and the *thobe* itself, the colours used refer to the natural dyes of a woman's region, the motifs refer to the natural surroundings of her village or city, age and marital status. This



Fig. 3 Jafa *thobe Jellaya* – the most festive *thobe* of Bayt Dajan (Kawar & Nasir, 2021)

characterizes *tatreez* as “from and of the land” (Khaled, 2023). The variation in different regions' *thobes* and embroidery motifs include Gaza's cypress tree (fig. 1), Bethlehem's luxurious gold-thread embroidery reflecting the wealth of families. Bayt Dajan, a village near Jaffa, was also known for its wealth (fig. 3). The artistic prowess of their embroiders



Fig. 1 Gazan *thobe* and close up of neckline style *tatreez* (Kawar & Nasir, 2021)

made it the centre of weaving and embroidery, influencing surrounding regions. (Saca, 2006).

Jerusalem existed as a core of the Palestinian consciousness prior to the British Mandate and 1948. It was a political centre, a religious centre, a cultural centre and a symbol of the

homeland connecting diversity across Palestine. The Ottoman period (1516–1918) created a layered identity between being Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, Christian, Ottoman, member of local communities disrupted the assumption that identity is unified and singular (Khalidi, 1997). This plurality ruptured the strict regionality of *tatreez* since the influx of new materials, colours and stitching techniques during the Ottoman Empire elevated *tatreez* from a household craft to a more refined textile art (Dedman, 2016).

Palestinian identity became stronger in the presence external threat, where mobilization was constantly present especially to protect the land and holy places, which are both central to Palestinian identity and belonging. Therefore, resistance was a unifying point for national consciousness (Khalidi, 1997). This reflects Ibn Khaldoun's (1377/1967) *assabiyah* arising as a result of a shared hardship which constitutes deeper collective solidarity and belonging. As mentioned prior, this Palestinian identity was not singular. Social belonging in Palestine was largely articulated through local and regional affiliations embedded within the broader context of *Bilad al-Sham* (Levant) (Khalidi, 1997; Hourani, 1991). It was also connected to a greater Arab identity articulated through the role of language in connection to shared historical experiences. Through the collective language, collective memory and remembrance developed a sense of pan-Arab national consciousness especially as a result of adversity and colonialism (Rifai, 2024).

***Tatreez* and the British Mandate**

Following the resistance against the Ottoman Empire and end of World War I, political identity was rethought, where the British mandate (1919-1948) and Zionist immigration accelerated Palestinian national consciousness through resistance to protect the shared homeland. This also took shape through education and press where the identity was not constricted to urban elites rather became embedded in public discourse (Khalidi, 1997).

Such developments align with Benedict Anderson's concept that nations are "imagined communities," whose emergence was facilitated by print capitalism through the dissemination of shared languages, narratives, and collective experiences (Anderson, 1983). However, this identity was not 'imagined' per se, rather reflects the initial identity in connection to the land which was exposed to existential threat by colonialism (Khalidi, 1997).

During the British Mandate, increasing industrialization and the influx of European textile imports led to the incorporation of machine-made and prefabricated fabrics. (Weir, 1989), *tatreez* was used as a form of resistance that communicated collective memory and thus extended identity and belonging especially in connection to the land (Cooper, 2025; Khalidi, 1997). A motif that developed during that time is the Officer's Badge which imitates British military rank. Ghnaim also traces the Missiles motif to experiences of British colonial rule, arguing that it documented Palestinian encounters with new forms of modern warfare. The chest panel is embroidered with missiles, while upside-down trees symbolize the destruction they caused and flowers at the hemline represent places left untouched by such violence, transforming the thobe into a visual record of colonial experience (Cooper, 2025).

Tatreez* through *Al-Nakba

The considerable shift in motifs however refers back to *Al-Nakba*.¹⁴ As families fled for safety, they left their homes and belongings, with the thought of returning to their locked homes. However, family heirlooms, including *thobes*, were looted from the homes of Palestinian families who fled. The tradition of *tatreez* that women practiced regularly communally was impacted by the new political reality, characterized by displacement. These Palestinian families were now refugees living in camps in villages not yet destroyed or in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. These living situations made *tatreez* supplies and materials unaffordable and the practice itself not possible due to constant displacement (Ulloa, 2020). They also made the historic weaving centre of al-Majdal in Gaza inaccessible (Ghnaim, 2024). Many *tatreez* patterns disappeared due to environmental destruction and the ethnic cleansing of over 400 villages. As a result, both

¹⁴ "The catastrophe" in Arabic, which refers to the ethnic cleansing and displacement of Palestinians in Palestine, where 750,000 Palestinians were displaced between 1947 and 1950, which established the settler-colonization of the land to "create" the Zionist state.

tatreez and the environmental specificity central to the craft were partially erased (Khaled, 2023; Dedman, 2016).

Displacement connected women from different villages, leading them to share patterns and blend their regional specificity. The revival of the six-branch dress after 1948 demonstrates the emergence of a Palestinian national consciousness, particularly as it was the first *thobe* to feature curvilinear floral patterns not tied to a specific village or



Fig. 4 Six-branch *thobe*. Note. From Ghnaim's collection (Ghnaim, 2024)

town (fig. 4) (Dedman, 2016). *Tatreez* was reimagined and preserved within refugee camps (Khurana, 2024). The six-branch *thobe* followed a *shawal* silhouette with a simple tailored cut and narrow sleeves, making it easier to sew in camp conditions. Its embroidered six branches across the chest, sleeves, and skirt could be stitched using thin panels during financially difficult periods, later thickening as circumstances improved. In refugee camps, *tatreez* also became a source of income for women. Yet women's continued practice of *tatreez* despite these harsh conditions demonstrates its importance in preserving symbols of life and identity. Through every stitch, *tatreez* continues to embody and remember the centuries-old relationship to the land (Ghnaim, 2024).

This perseverance and continuity reflects the emergence of *sumud*, a term which signifies steadfastness and persistence in the face of adversity, not passive tolerance, but an active form of popular resistance (Young, 2022). In an interview with Lumos Transforms (2025), Dr. Samah Jabr criticizes simplistic translations of *sumud* as resilience, since they erupt through an individualistic psychological experience which does not reflect its meaning in the Palestinian context particularly that of a collectivist

culture. *Sumud* rests on community well-being, solidarity, survival and resistance not as merely surviving hardship but actively maintaining life, dignity, culture and community in the face of erasure and ongoing occupation. Therefore, *sumud* as a collective psychological experience is always politicized due to the political lived reality (Lumos Transforms, 2025).

In this context, *tatreez* becomes an act of resistance simply through being practiced and worn, reaffirming the people's connection to the land as inseparable from identity. It also functions as a tool of memory, preserving identity, values, and histories passed between generations (Khurana, 2024). Oppressed communities often find political space within culture through "hidden transcripts," which provide the ideological underpinnings needed to resist oppression (Scott, 1985). Therefore, these acts of resistance and cultural preservation become a continual rebirth of Palestinian identity, constantly deepening its meanings and associations as a refusal of disappearance. This transformed a traditionally domestic activity into a political intervention due to the lived experience of existential threat (Khurana, 2024).

The First *Intifada* Documented Through *Tatreez*

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) established in the early 1960s showcased *tatreez* worn for *dabkeh*¹⁵ performances worldwide and in international embroidery museums as a form of revival of heritage and political rhetoric, as well as cultural diplomacy (Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022). This was particularly important since the Zionist regime was not only practicing erasure but appropriation as well as part of the settler-colonial project. This was reflected in appropriating Palestinian *thobes*, embroidery, *dabkeh* among other cultural elements as Israeli (Khurana, 2024). It is through this political claim to cultural heritage that the PLO rejected identity erasure. Embroidered *thobes* were also worn throughout the long period of protests against the Zionist occupation, where traditional motifs acted as physical representations of the narratives of political struggle (Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022). While Anderson conceptualizes nations as imagined communities constituted through shared narratives and symbols, the case of *tatreez* suggests that collective bonds rooted in village affiliations, kinship networks, and shared cultural practices preceded the explicit nationalization of Palestinian identity.

¹⁵ A traditional Palestinian dance (Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022)

Embroidery therefore functioned less as a tool for creating solidarity than as a means of reasserting and visualizing an existing sense of collective belonging (Anderson, 1983; Khalidi, 1997).

The military occupation which started in 1967¹⁶ was accompanied by a range of techniques designed to assert control over Palestinians and their identity. A main aspect to this system was the design of a complex system of military censorship which aims to destroy all socio-cultural elements that evoke or could potentially evoke the Palestinian collective memory. Between 1967 and 1993 specifically, the Zionist Israeli censorship banned the Palestinian flag, public display of the *Kufiyyah* (a Palestinian head scarf), and the use of the national colours of red, white, and green (Young, 2022). Therefore, during the first *Intifada* (Palestinian uprising) in 1987-1983, women responded by embroidering nationalist motifs explicitly onto their thobes and deliberately using the national colours of red, black, green, and white. They would embroider the map, the flag, write Palestine in the national colours, and even escape routes that protesters can follow and rely on. This marks a transformative point where resistance becomes embroidered onto the Palestinian garment (Dedman, 2016; Khaled, 2023). The Intifada thobe was embroidered with these symbols as well as olive branches or orange trees with phrases such as 'We will return' (fig. 5) (Quinn, 2019).

Even after the first *Intifada* and following the Oslo Accords (1993) establishing the Palestinian Authority, a Second *Intifada* (*Al-Aqsa Intifada* (2000-2005)) could not be stopped (Young, 2022). Settler colonialism is not an event but a persisting structure. It is derived from a logic of elimination where the native population will always be an obstacle to the settler project. This is not limited to physical extermination and displacement. Rather it involves the elimination of the native as native; settler colonialism "destroys to replace". This elimination extends significantly to the cultural sphere to erase memory and histories, appropriate indigenous culture, rename places, rewrite historical narratives, and deny native presence (Wolfe, 2006). Therefore, cultural practices become sites of resistance not as a form of re-imagining identity but restating identity.

¹⁶ 1967 refers to the Six day war or the Arab-Israeli war which resulted in Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank – the areas of greatest Palestinian population – as well as the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula, additionally causing a second mass displacement of Palestinians from Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank (Peretz, 2005)



Fig. 5 *Intifada thobe* which is said to be designed by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's wife, Suha. Note. From the Textile Research Centre, Leiden, TRC 2003.0007a (Ghnaim, 2024)

***Tatreez* in the Diaspora**

People continuously create and recreate identities through culture, memory, stories, and politics. It emerges through being and experience, where the history of the identity, especially its interaction with colonialism, changes identity into site of struggle. Decolonization is not merely political as it is cultural and psychological as well. This is intensified in the diaspora since identity is also produced and reproduced through representations. This is because identity contains both continuity of collective connection as well as rupture which is what transforms the collective connection through displacement, migration, colonialism, and exile. In the diaspora, history as part of identity is accessed through memory, narrative, and storytelling. Therefore, there is a reimagination of the past in the present through cultural practices which become political acts (Hall, 1990). Bhabha (1994) extends on this through explaining that culture is constantly being reinterpreted in the present through the Third Space where identity is always under negotiation through interaction. The Third Space creates hybridity where the meaning of identity is transformed. This disrupts colonial authority because it breaks the rigid dichotomies that colonialism relies on such as colonizer and colonized, civilized and uncivilized, etc. (Bhabha, 1994).

This reflects the way contemporary Palestinian embroidery operates through post-memorial expression. The mnemonic chain – as Sheets calls it – of *tatreez* transmission does not only preserve Palestinian identity but also family memory. Therefore, though *tatreez* historically documented lived experiences, in the diaspora, it

increasingly documents inherited experience and emotion tied to the land and identity (Sheets, 2024). Palestinian women in the diaspora pass the art of *tatreez* to their daughters, “teaching them how to deploy the language of *tatreez* on their *thobe* to tell their story of resistance and existence.” It reaffirms a connection to a land that the Zionist settler-colonial regime has deprived them of or is in the process of depriving them from it (Ghnaim, 2024). This is particularly important since *tatreez* in of its own is a storytelling tool. Suffering is inherited through embroidered storytelling as well as healing through *sumud* and intergenerational connection, particularly that involved with *tatreez* circles (Sheets, 2024).

However, memory is not simply recollection, it makes political claims, challenges dominant narratives, asserts rights, and preserves identity. Hence, it is always political. Palestinian memory exists against the hegemonic narrative and thus, must constantly struggle against historical denial and narrative exclusion (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007). Drawing on Marianne Hirsch’s concept of post memory, Abu-Lughod argues that younger generations inherit memories they never directly experienced. Therefore, national identity still survives across generations of exile, since it is not static but constantly recreated through retelling, commemorations, and political discourse (Abu-Lughod, 2007). This resonates with Dedman’s (2016) interpretation of *tatreez* as dynamic rather than static which grants it the power to survive. *Tatreez* is continuously a vessel for Palestinian identity because it adapts to the sociopolitical memory and experiences of people (Dedman, 2016). Today, *tatreez* acts as a proxy for land and “as a prolific creative medium to envision freedom and grasp onto hope” of liberation and life (Ghnaim, 2024).

The Digitizing of *Tatreez*

The digital age has brought new mechanisms for preserving identity and reimagining it in the context of *tatreez*. Zain Masri created ‘Tirazain’, a complete digital archive of all available Palestinian motifs free of charge with English descriptions, making them accessible to a wider audience (Abueish, 2024). This is a testament to a modern form of preservation through digitization as an archive to an art which acts as an archive in of its own. Its significance is further amplified since many in current generations do not possess skills in the practice of *tatreez* or do not have the time to practice it. Therefore, the role of women in resistance and liberation becomes an everlasting topic in *tatreez* especially when studying their role in preserving and re-imagining their identities as products of

oppression, resistance, and *sumud* (Dedman, 2016; Ulloa, 2020). Women in the diaspora seek similar practices through extending the sites of resistance to the West through community-based initiatives as “*tatreez* circles” which honor the traditional practice environment, preserving community and dialogue. Dina Asfour and Yomn Al-Kaisi adapted the practice to contemporary contexts by founding the *Tatreez* Collective in 2022 teaching *tatreez* workshops and educational programs across Europe (Sheets, 2024; Williams, 2024).

Others such as the graphic designer Maya Amer designed a chest-piece of traditional thobe in coded colours that express the number of all (known) martyrs of the ongoing genocide on Gaza from October 7th to October 31st of 2023. The number of stitches add up to the number of martyrs in each category where green represented women, red represented girls, pink represented boys, yellow represented men, and gray depicted unidentified bodies (fig. 6) (Husain, 2024).



Fig. 6 “Embroidery collar from a thobe that dates back to 1920” (Amer, 2023)

This is especially significant since it emerges in connection to the lionized figure of the *Shahid*¹⁷ in the Palestinian identity, as a celebration of life and integral to identity which has correlated with cultural and artistic expression since the *Nakba* (Young, 2022). Through this, social media can be understood as a new arena for Palestinian resistance, where cultural artifacts become semiotic tools for Palestinian narrative of history and the ongoing struggle. Representation of identity across the digital sphere allows direct communication which reshapes the understanding and perception of Palestinian identity. Through the digital sphere *tatreez* becomes mobile and increasingly detached from specific local contexts while remaining tied to Palestinian identity. This allows Palestinians to represent themselves and their people separate from mainstream dominant negative stereotypes. Identity is reproduced online through sharing, posting, commenting, and circulating cultural symbols, creating an active Palestinian participation in constructing a shared sense of belonging. This is a continuation and adaptation of how

¹⁷ Shahid is a term used to refer to the Palestinians martyrs killed in the conflict (Young, 2022).

tatreez has shifted across various spheres, but the integrity of cultural resistance has always been maintained (Abu-Ayyash, 2024).

In Bhabha's (1994) concept of ambivalence, identities emerge in the Third Space, communities end up occupying multiple cultural positions simultaneously. A colonial subject may speak the colonizer's language while simultaneously resisting colonial domination and preserving indigenous traditions. Bhabha argues that liberation does not come from recovering an original identity, rather it comes from embracing the productive instability of the Third Space by renegotiating inherited traditions rather than simply preserving them (Bhabha, 1994).

Pursuits such as Amer's design are particularly important since there is a risk of representation becoming decoupled from Palestinian politics. Khoury articulates, that contemporary forms of *tatreez* revival especially through global art markets, diaspora cultural industries, and liberal multicultural consumption, risk contribution to a process of normalization, where Palestinian culture is separated from the political conditions that produced it. In this sense, embroidery survives, but the colonial reality that gives it political meaning is obscured (Khoury, 2020). This is especially significant since there is a clear attempt to 'modernize' *tatreez* especially through decoupling the practice from communally hand-made, 'slow fashion' to suit mass productionist consumerist societies. This is especially prominent through the 'transition' to machine-made products, diminishing and isolating the practice's significant origin as a demonstration of the land and nature, a collective processing of circumstance which is in direct opposition to consumerist practices (Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022).

Neoliberal Practices vs. Resistance

Neoliberal systems tend to transform political struggles into cultural commodity where resistance becomes a marketable aesthetic where consumers can celebrate Palestinian embroidery without confronting Palestinian oppression. This creates a dynamic where international art institutions often prefer depoliticized representation of Palestine that would be acceptable to liberal audiences. Through the extension of *tatreez* into luxury products, gallery objects, fashion commodities, and lifestyle branding, *tatreez* is commercialized and moved further away from refugee camps and embroiderers thus erasing the social realities behind it (Khoury, 2020). This is especially significant since during the first displacements, *tatreez* became a labour for women to support their

families. These practices risk removing women's active role in resistance from the centre of conversation (Khaled, 2023). This issue evokes a root problem as well which entangled this collectivist practice to the market, where after the Nakba, rural women were severed from their agricultural livelihoods and forced to take up paid work instead (Khurana, 2020).

Organizations such as *Inash Al-Usra* were created as political resistance to support families especially for women through employment. This integration of rural women into the wage-labour market entangled *tatreez* into capitalist modes of production making women workers and *tatreez* work rather than archival storytelling, essential for communal processing of personal and collective memory and trauma (Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022). However, in an interview, Insaf Ajjawi who runs a collective in a displaced Palestinian camp in Lebanon, explains that due to the economic conditions, the collective fulfils a unique opportunity where labour-intensive processes meet enjoyment of *tatreez*, knowing that the Palestinian identity and heritage is being preserved and shared with the world (Quinn, 2019).

On the other hand, Dehkordi (2025) explains how such system introduce class dynamics to the practice since politically and socially privileged individuals initiated these organizations to support marginalised groups by creating embroidery-producing organizations that employ refugee women and consistently, wealthier individuals would buy said products, transitioning this archival art to become capital (Dehkordi, 2025; Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022). Moreover, charity-based development models through NGOs encourage women to copy standardized motifs rather than create original designs (Dedman, 2016; Khurana, 2024). This is in direct correlation with the Western individualistic colonial understandings of land as a means of extraction rather than land as self (Coronil, 2001). As elites and global powers dominate the means of production, they also control the means of symbolic production, or all aspects of society which Gramsci names as the "ideological sectors" of culture, religion, education, and media, etc. (Scott, 1985). Thus, it emerges as symbolic hegemony where the practice of culture in of itself must be directly tied to these interests and especially economic interests; practicing culture is only legitimate when it generates economic "productivity."

Such initiatives structure women in impoverished communities through an income which is seldom enough to develop financial independence and deconstruct the wage gap (Dedman, 2016; Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022). In this way, *tatreez* may become

detached from its collectivist dimension to emerge in an individualistic framework that appeals to capitalist frameworks. This is especially significant since the collectivist context is essential for the strive for liberation and resistance (Dedman, 2016; Fanon, 1961). It is through the extension of *tatreez* to the market that a class layer of who gets recognition for *tatreez* is introduced, where contemporary markets frequently celebrate designers, artists, curators, and collectors while the embroiderers themselves remain invisible (Khoury, 2020).

Contemporary Reimaginings of *Tatreez*

Coronil (2001) explains how the integration of distant cultures into a common global space entails a consolidation of the neoliberal economy as the main culture, creating an illusion of coexistence between the two opposites of collectivist cultures and neoliberal frameworks, where neoliberalism emerges as the universal culture. He outlines how “neoliberal globalization is implosive rather than expansive: it connects powerful centres to subordinate peripheries”, a fragmented integration rather than a complete one. Collectivism inherently poses a threat to neoliberalism. Consequently, questions develop regarding the extent in which modern practices of *tatreez* can maintain their historical and identity integrity as a form of resistance without being diluted by such neoliberal frameworks. Marcos categorizes current neoliberal globalization as a World War due its claim over a vast number of lives especially through poverty and marginalization (Coronil, 2001). This is particularly significant since embroidered products are contemporarily expensive, and as such only accessible to middle-class and wealthy consumers (Dedman, 2016). This acts as a double occupation, where the first occupation is the Zionist settler colonialism and its consequences, and the second is economic exploitation and precarity, both of which trap women between colonial dispossession and economic exploitation (Khurana, 2024).

Through this understanding, *tatreez* becomes diluted by contemporary market frameworks, since it becomes only a method of asserting representation. Interestingly, modernizing *tatreez* is most prominently found within Palestine, as in the diaspora there is often a romanticization of the traditional craft itself since the presence of Palestine itself is lacking (Khaled, 2023). Wafa Ghnaim for example, founded *Tatreez* and Tea, a Palestinian-led educational initiative, running workshops on the origins of *tatreez* and teaching the craft itself as a means of preservation. This intertwines the practice as a

passed down archive and secures the future of remembrance consequently (Sheets, 2024). However, Omar Joseph Nasser-Khoury challenges this by explaining how simply identifying as Palestinian or using Palestinian symbols does not automatically constitute resistance, meaning cultural revival is not inherently political. He extends this argument through commodifying language through using the word “*tatreez*”. In this sense the term creates an exoticized and marketable term rather than part of a wider political vocabulary. He explains that heritage preservation can sometimes unintentionally reproduce the very power structures it seeks to challenge, as seen with “feel-good resistance” where consumers feel politically engaged through political consumption alone, strengthening neoliberal structures rather than challenging the colonial structures (Khoury, 2020). Khurana (2024) refers to this phenomenon as “commodity activism” where consumers not only buy a product but also a political identity and moral commitment. Therefore, culture can contribute to resistance, but only when it is linked to broader political commitments (Khoury, 2020).

Ghnaim directly replies to Khoury’s article highlighting how visibility is not the same as depoliticization. She argues that making *tatreez* visible across diverse fronts introduces new audiences to Palestinian history. She rejects that *tatreez* should be limited to certain practitioners explaining that the implication of participation with cultural traditions constitutes survival. *Tatreez’s* recurring theme throughout history has been adaptation, where it reflects the survival of the identity and traditions. She highlights how discussions about *tatreez* often become abstract debates about nationalism or neoliberalism while overlooking the women who actually preserved the practice, expressing a need to shift attention away from theory and back towards lived practice. This is because knowledge is a site of resistance and this knowledge transmission seeks to reject erasure. Ghnaim criticizes the creation of a false dichotomy between cultural celebration and political struggle, since Palestinian existence itself is politicized thus, cultural preservation becomes a political act (Ghnaim, 2020). Other scholars such as Abu-Ayyash support this claim, identifying that Palestinian cultural identity cannot be separated from political resistance; cultural symbols become political because the Palestinian existence itself has become politicized (Abu-Ayyash, 2024).

The accessibility and affordability afforded by globalization for *tatreez* as a solidarity symbol has widened the scope of resistance and solidarity on a global level, increasing knowledge and curiosity about the historical identity and culture of

Palestinians (Dehkordi, 2025). Social media platforms allow embroiderers to bypass traditional NGO structures, creating online platforms which democratize access to markets (Dedman, 2016). Ghnaim’s organization attempts to combat the possible negative effects of this cultural extension by outlining in their policies that they do not condone any practice or use of the knowledge passed down as a means of profit or appropriation (TI, 2026). This is an active direction towards integrating historical and identity resistance as well as memory preservation while combatting the hegemonic neoliberal frameworks. This is especially important since increased accessibility and popularity of *tatreez* paved way for Israeli companies to appropriate the patterns into mass market production, passing them as their own, directly funding continuous land theft and identity erasure (Khurana, 2024; Quinn, 2019).

An example of successful digital campaigning towards embracing Palestinian *tatreez* as resistance is evident in Susan Darraj’s campaign #TweetYourThobe. In this example, digital platforms enabled Palestinian women in the diaspora to create a counter public space where *tatreez* is collectively displayed, discussed, and reclaimed as a marker of Palestinian identity. The campaign used Twitter strategically to connect dispersed Palestinians across national borders, where it did not attempt to treat *tatreez* as a



Fig. 4 Photo album published by Darraj of herself wearing an embroidered denim jacket with Palestinian *tatreez* (Abu-Rub, 2021)



Fig. 5 Photo album of a woman wearing the Palestinian thobe in 1981 and 2018 (Abu-Rub, 2021)



Fig. 6 Image published by Darraj “of a group of women in their Palestinian *thobe*” (Abu-Rub, 2021)

museum artifact. Instead, there were adaptations of *tatreez* into contemporary forms demonstrating the practice’s continued relevance in modern life (fig. 4). Through hashtags, images, sharing, and retweeting, participants transformed *tatreez* from an individual craft practice into a transnational network of cultural preservation and collective memory (fig. 5; fig. 6) (Abu-Rub, 2021). Huyssen (1995) outlines how

contemporary memory culture is characterized as a fear of forgetting, which arose as confidence in modernity as a clear horizon of progress declined and societies increasingly turned towards memory and the past. As modern media technologies accelerate information flows, they contribute to historical forgetting. Thus, memory boom emerges as a reaction against information overload (Huyssen, 1995). This reflects the dialogue contemporary practices of *tatreez* carry through modernization as well as away from it.

The boundaries of *tatreez* understood through gender role boundaries are also being deconstructed. Although it is a historically women's craft, resistance through *tatreez* extended to male political prisoners in Zionist prisons - which are sites of undisputed masculinity - making the practice by men a source of resistance and pride practiced in secrecy (Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022). This practice consists a form of remembrance and *sumud* in the face of suffering and torture imposed by the Zionist Authorities (Amnesty International, 2023; Jubeh & Bawatneh, 2022). These men remind themselves of their narrative and truth firstly. Secondly, they remind themselves of their women. The symbol of womanhood demonstrates an understanding of the power of women as life-givers, as the beating heart of all that is alive, including resistance, (Abu-Lughod & Sa'di, 2007; Freedom Flotilla, 2017). Through preserving truth, narrative, and identity women became custodians of knowledge and shapers of identity, contributing significantly to processing of collective trauma (Sheets, 2024).

Conclusion

The current transformation of *tatreez* differs of that from past, where the integrity of the practice was maintained, posing questions regarding modern reimagination of *tatreez* as a form of resistance. Can this new modality serve the path of liberation when it is being adapted to capitalist imperialist frameworks that inevitably erase the significance they hold? Why is there a general acceptance of detaching identities from their historical and political foundations while still characterizing them as resistance? This is especially significant, since displaced and prosecuted women adapted *tatreez* through cultural continuity amidst historical and social ruptures (Dehkordi, 2025). Colonialist frameworks understand culture as the defining aspect of identity; it is not the physical manifestation that is the identity rather it is the values and principals. Regardless of how the physical manifestations evolve in response to changing sociopolitical contexts, they ultimately continue to reaffirm the collectivist foundations rooted in resistance to

oppression, attachment to the land, and communal belonging. If there is an attempt to bring cultures into the sphere of globalization, extending the fight for resistance and amplifying voices, even through the language of the weaved thread, there is a certain importance in maintaining root principals as a means of escaping the dilemma.

Preserving *tatreez* must emerge through authenticity which is far more complex than rigidly preserving historical motifs. *Tatreez* is not only characterized by the motif but by the practitioner, cultural context, and lived reality of Palestinian women. The most meaningful contemporary embroidery practices often emerge from local cooperatives and independent artisans rather than large institutions, which encourage collaboration, preserve personal relationships tied to the craft, allow greater creative freedom, and more closely resemble historical *tatreez* traditions (Dedman, 2016). However, *tatreez* does not automatically liberate Palestine and equally so it does not automatically liberate women. This is because modern frameworks create a “coexistence” between resistance and exploitation (Khurana, 2024). This poses a question; can resistance coexist with exploitation when the goal of resistance to liberate is directly contradictory to exploitation? The normalisation of such phenomena emerges from depoliticizing culture as Khoury (2020) describes it. Colonial structures constantly encourage political activity that can absorb popular anger without fundamentally changing colonial structures. Hence, political struggle becomes domesticated, contained, and depoliticized (Fanon, 1961). This is why as Khoury (2020) and Dedman (2016) mention, there needs to be an active question and examination if political engagement is channelling material challenge to the colonial power. This is only possible through preserving the collective nature of the Palestinian identity and its relation to *tatreez*, emphasizing mass mobilization rather than elite negotiation of identity and representation (Dedman, 2016; Fanon, 1961).

Understanding how the collective operates also varies and changes across generation, where *tatreez* was usually transferred through women across familial generation, third generation Palestinians in the diaspora more prominently learn *tatreez* on TikTok and digital platforms as post-memory (Ulloa, 2020; Sheets, 2024). This raises questions regarding the integrity of the practice and if it is indeed connected to generational post memory or can be branched elsewhere. The questions posed by the practice of *tatreez* and its constant changing nature reflect a broader understanding of identity through experience, especially when the cultural tradition in of itself is built on the malleability of concepts of belonging and expression.

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Urban Reinterpretations of Space: The Transformation of Socialist Housing-Estate Garages into Service Facilities

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Caption: Garage salon.

Source: own photo modified for anonymity.

Abstract

This study examines the transformation of garages in socialist housing estates into contemporary service spaces, with a particular focus on beauty salons. Drawing on perspectives from urban anthropology and architectural anthropology, the research explores how originally utilitarian and ideologically defined spaces are reinterpreted and domesticated by their users. The empirical basis of the study consists of ethnographic fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation and archival research conducted in a Hungarian housing estate characterized by a high concentration of garage-based beauty businesses. The paper situates these transformations within the broader framework of socialist urban planning and postsocialist urban change, engaging with concepts such as the production of space, domestication and “garage capitalism.” It argues that the conversion of garages reflects not only economic adaptation but also processes of meaning-making, identity formation and spatial negotiation. These spaces evolve from neutral architectural units into personalized workplaces that mediate between private and public spheres. The findings highlight the agency of local actors (particularly women entrepreneurs) in reshaping the built environment and creating socially embedded economic practices. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that small-scale spatial transformations contribute to larger urban processes, including the functional diversification and gradual integration of housing estates into the urban fabric. By focusing on everyday practices and marginal spaces, the research provides insight into how inherited socialist infrastructures are continuously reinterpreted in the postsocialist context.

Keywords: postsocialism, garage capitalism, urbanism, entrepreneurship, socialist housing estates

Introduction

This writing examines the transformation of garages situated within socialist housing estates into contemporary service spaces, with particular attention to beauty salons functioning inside these originally utilitarian structures. My research began with the observation that the ground-floor garages beneath the panel blocks of a housing estate, that I often passed by, contain an unexpectedly high number of beauty-related businesses (hair salons, cosmetic studios and nail salons) operating side by side in what initially appears to be an economically irrational density. The most plausible explanation was the presence of a strong local demand that sustains these businesses. This prompted the central question of my study: how can a housing-estate garage be adapted into a suitable space for contemporary beauty-industry work, and why do local entrepreneurs choose these units as their workplaces?

The broader context of my writing lies in the socialist-era logic of urban planning. Housing estates built in this period were intended not merely to address housing shortages but to structure the everyday life of citizens according to ideological principles. The built environment was thus a tool of discipline and regulation, shaping both public and private spheres of social life (Lurcza, 2024). In my view examining garages in this environment provides insight into how residents reinterpret and repurpose state-designed spaces in order to create more livable and functional settings. Therefore this study explores how the transformation of the garage results not only in a physical change of function but also in a rearticulation of meaning, identity and place. The garages of the estate of this study today represent a compelling example of how urban populations creatively adapt the built environment inherited from socialism.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical foundations of this study emerge from urban anthropology and architectural anthropology. In Hungarian scholarship, Fejós and Niedermüller (1983), along with A. Gergely and Bali (2007), established the anthropological view of the city as a lived and experienced environment rather than purely a planned structure. Their work emphasizes understanding the city from the inside, through the eyes and practices of its inhabitants. In this sense, anthropologists examine how people negotiate their everyday surroundings and create their own interpretations of space regardless of official planning intentions.

The socialist housing estate has long been associated with questions of social organization and spatial policy. Szelényi and Konrád (1969) argued that newly built estates created complex tensions because rapid urbanization was mismatched with insufficient infrastructure. Germuska (2004) demonstrated that socialist architecture was deeply ideological, designed to promote uniformity and control. Understanding this ideological framework is essential when examining how these spaces later became repurposed.

Architectural anthropology provides the primary analytical lens of this writing. Lefebvre's (1991) concept of produced space emphasizes that space is always shaped by its physical form, its representations and its everyday uses. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) differentiates between space and place, where place emerges when people imbue a location with meaning. This study adopts this approach to understand how garages transition from neutral architectural spaces to meaningful work environments shaped by aesthetic, social and economic practices.

Postsocialist urban studies further inform this research. Vasilevska, Vranić and Marinković (2015) describe "garage capitalism," the widespread process of turning garages into commercial units after 1990. Yet the earliest conversions on the Bástyá estate actually predate 1989, indicating that spatial adaptation already existed under socialism. Nagy's (2023) concept of domestication: residents „taming” centrally planned environments provides a crucial theoretical element. The garages examined here exemplify this process as well.

Methodology

The research was conducted through unstructured and semi-structured interviews, participant observation and visual documentation (Kovács, 2007). I selected this housing estate as my primary site after identifying its uniquely high concentration of garage-based beauty salons.

I conducted interviews with hairdressers, nail technicians and cosmeticians working in these garages, as well as residents, clients and a municipal official responsible for conversion permits. I also interviewed informal home-based nail technicians, who operate outside official regulation and contribute to the local beauty economy.

In addition, I examined archives documenting garage conversions between 1988 and 2010 and reviewed local newspapers to understand the historical trajectory of spatial

change. The combination of ethnographic research and documentary analysis offered insight into both lived experience and structural transformation.

The Ideological Construction of Housing Estates

Socialist housing estates across Eastern Europe adhered to a standardized spatial model. According to Hegedűs and Tosics (1996), estates were often constructed on the urban periphery and built according to principles derived from modernist functionalism and socialist ideology. Their architecture, defined by prefabrication and uniformity, reflected state values of collectivism and order. Szelényi (1990) noted that Eastern European cities differ from Western ones in that social status does not gradually decline from center to periphery, but instead shifts sharply, with housing estates forming distinct enclaves.

Although the town I conducted my fieldwork in was not a major socialist industrial center, factories with expanding workforces attracted workers from surrounding areas, prompting the construction of several housing estates (Iván, 1994). The estate of the study differs from others in the town because of its near-central location, giving it a higher perceived status compared to peripheral estates.

The earliest buildings in the area, built in the 1950s, served employees of a factory, while the panel blocks relevant to this study were added in the late 1980s. The design of socialist estates intentionally limited informal gathering spaces. Stairwells acted as transitional zones where residents moved without lingering. A resident explained that planners intentionally avoided creating places suitable for unsupervised assembly.

Within this design philosophy, garages were strictly utilitarian and private. Their scarcity and the ideological ambivalence toward car ownership (Siegelbaum, 2010) created conditions under which garages were both useful and insufficiently developed. These initial constraints shaped the later reinterpretation of garages in the postsocialist period.

The Domestication and Taming of the Housing Estate and its Garages

In socialist architectural ideology, the city was envisioned as a regulated spatial system capable of shaping its inhabitants (Germuska, 2004). One participant described how, during construction, planners intentionally omitted communal spaces, preventing spontaneous gathering. The built environment reinforced compartmentalization: residents passed through neutral corridors and stairwells before retreating into private

flats. This framework influenced the original purpose of the garages, which were designed as private storage or parking facilities rather than commercial environments.

Architectural anthropology emphasizes that architectural spaces are never static, but continually shaped by social practices. Gieryn (2000) and Lefebvre (1991) highlight that buildings consist not merely of material elements but also of symbolic and emotional dimensions. Nagy (2023) argues that residents must „domesticate” centrally planned spaces to make them livable. This taming is evident in the garages of the estate of the study, where service providers transform cold, utilitarian units into warm, intimate workplaces.

From my fieldwork experience I can say that the act of conversion is itself a form of domesticating and humanizing space. Beauty professionals furnish the garages with décor, controlled lighting, mirrors, color themes and displays of professional certificates. Through these aesthetic and functional changes, the salons become personalized and meaningful. Tuan’s (1977) distinction between space and place is central here: garages become places through repeated use, emotional investment and aesthetic transformation.

Technical constraints also shape this domestication. The building’s pipes run through the ceilings, requiring false ceilings that preserve access; heating and cooling systems must be retrofitted; water lines must be extended to create small wet rooms. These interventions illustrate how salon owners creatively adapt rigid architectural constraints.

Michel de Certeau’s (1984) distinction between strategies and tactics, interpreted by Séra (2007), helps explain this process. The socialist state imposed spatial strategies through planning, while residents responded with everyday tactics that reinterpreted those spaces. Transforming a garage into a salon is such a tactic: a subtle reworking of space within existing constraints.

Garage capitalism

The essence of the domestication of space (that is, the taming of housing estate spaces) lies in the fact that those who live and work in the housing estate are capable of transforming even the ideological structure of the buildings; in other words, they deconstruct the original political intent in accordance with their own needs. Capitalism—that is, the free flow of capital—in our case takes shape precisely on the „foundations” of housing estates, in the form of so-called garage capitalism.

Researchers at the University of Niš conducted an interdisciplinary study in the largest residential area built during the socialist era, in the city of Niš, Serbia. The research group published a study titled *“Garage capitalism” as a form and process of post-socialist urban changes: Its pace, intensity and structural characteristics. A case study of Niš, Serbia* (2015), in which they examine the phenomenon known as garage capitalism. In the literature, garage capitalism is described as the conversion and adaptation of garages, living spaces, basements, and other spaces on the ground floor of buildings into retail or other service spaces, a phenomenon that emerged in most Central and Eastern European countries at the beginning of the transitional period following the fall of communism (Vasilevska et al. 2015, 149). They analyzed this phenomenon as a functional form of space resulting from two processes of post-socialist urban change, which, in their view, significantly influenced the transformation of the urban fabric of post-socialist cities. One of these processes is the expansion of commercial functions, and the other is the restructuring and reorganization of the large housing estates from the socialist era (Ibid.)

Stated by Sonia Hirt (2006), the early years of the transition were characterized by a high level of retail activity, which manifested itself primarily in the form of garage capitalism. In addition to the term “garage capitalism,” Hirt also uses the term “basement entrepreneurship” to describe the process by which garages, basements, ground-floor apartments, lobbies, community spaces, and other spare rooms in existing buildings are converted into retail stores or other service providers. This expression also applies to my research, since it is not only garages that are „incorporated” into economic processes, but also other spaces originally designed as storage areas.

According to Boren and Gentile, the phenomenon of garage capitalism emerged as a product of the relationship between social resilience and the socio-spatial changes occurring in the built environment of post-socialist cities, and it plays an important role in the transformation of built landscapes (Boren – Gentile 2007; Bouzarovski – Salukvadze – Gentile 2011. Kiemeli Vasilevska & mtsa, 2015. 151.). In the opinion of Burawoy and Verdery, garage capitalism should be viewed as a new market and social initiative rather than a remnant of an older mindset (3 Burawoy – Verdery 1999 Idézi: Ibid). Following this line of thought, garage capitalism can thus be interpreted as a manifestation of economic transition and globalization, as well as the rise of private enterprise and consumer culture (Stanilov 2007a,b). According to Golubchikov, the socialist spatial legacy loses its authenticity during the transition process and becomes a

“neoliberal infrastructure” suited to capitalist processes, following the logic of new mechanisms designed to regulate development. Garage capitalism thus has recognizable physical and economic manifestations of its „hybrid spatiality,” both at the level of individual buildings and large housing estates (Golubchikov 2013. Idézi: Vasilevska & mtsa, 2015. 151.)

Most studies date the emergence of garage capitalism to the transitional period of the 1990s. This is interesting because, in the case of the housing estate I studied, an application was submitted as early as 1988—the year of its completion—to reclassify one of the garages; in other words, even before the change of regime, there was a clear demand to incorporate these spaces into commercial use, more importantly, they were able to take advantage of this opportunity, as the request was approved. In fact, one of the first procedures was initiated specifically to establish a beauty salon, so the current trend—the emergence of service-oriented businesses—was already evident at that time.

I believe that the housing estate I have chosen because, on the one hand, there is no garage area here, which often introduces a secondary economy—that is, an economic gray zone—which can certainly be interpreted as a post-socialist remnant, but whose primary role existed only during socialism’s economy of scarcity. Without the rows of garages, therefore, commercial and service functions are explicitly shifted to the garages located at the base of the building, the maintenance of which, according to my observations, now requires a more formal mode of operation. That is, these businesses are officially registered with the local government and have been reclassified, thereby losing their original function. Furthermore, because the urban fabric in the city center has noticeably begun to incorporate the housing estate area, the integration of this area into the city center is precisely due to the commercial and service facilities, which were established by the garage shops located here.

By converting garages into garage salons the boundary between private and public also shifts. Although officially commercial, garage salons do not function as fully open public spaces. Treatments involve intimacy; therefore, access is controlled. Doors may be half-open, with „closed” signs displayed during appointments. A resident aptly summarized this condition: “they are open and not open at the same time.”

Thus, domestication of the garages is a complex process involving architectural modification, aesthetic personalization, boundary negotiation and „emotional investment”. The once utilitarian garages become places of work, identity, trust and

stability—integral to the everyday fabric of the estate. This transformation also reinforces the role of these spaces as nodes of micro-scale economic activity that sustain local livelihoods. At the same time, their semi-private character allows for the development of closer, more personal relationships between service providers and clients, further strengthening their embeddedness in the community. In this sense, garage salons function not only as economic units but also as socially meaningful environments that mediate between domestic and public life. Moreover, their continued proliferation suggests that such hybrid spatial forms respond effectively to both market demands and local social expectations. Ultimately, these spaces exemplify how small-scale entrepreneurial practices can reshape not only the physical environment but also the social dynamics of housing estates.

Conclusion

The transformation of garages into beauty salons on the housing estate of the study demonstrates how residents reinterpret the spatial legacy of socialist architecture. What were once strictly functional, ideologically defined units now serve as personalized workplaces embedded in the local economy. Through the lens of architectural anthropology, these garages emerge as domesticated spaces rich in meaning, shaped by the professional, economic and emotional practices of the women who work there.

Their transformation challenges the rigid spatial logic inherited from socialism and exemplifies how everyday users reshape urban environments. The garages of my field illustrate the dynamic nature of place-making, where state-designed structures acquire new uses and new meanings through lived practice. Ultimately, they show how architecture becomes intertwined with identity, livelihood and the subtle reworking of urban space.

At the same time, these transformations highlight the agency of local actors in negotiating structural constraints. The adaptation of garages is not merely a response to economic necessity, but also an expression of creativity and resilience within a changing socio-economic context. The emergence of beauty salons in particular underscores the gendered dimension of this process, as women entrepreneurs play a central role in redefining these spaces. Their work not only generates income but also contributes to the social cohesion of the neighborhood by creating semi-private environments of trust and interaction.

Furthermore, the phenomenon illustrates how postsocialist urban landscapes are shaped by layered temporalities, where past ideologies, present needs and future aspirations intersect. The garages retain traces of their original function while simultaneously embodying new economic and cultural meanings. This hybridity reflects broader processes of urban transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, where inherited infrastructures are continuously reinterpreted rather than replaced. The findings of this study also suggest that small-scale spatial practices can have wider urban implications. The concentration of service-oriented businesses contributes to the gradual integration of the housing estate into the urban core, blurring the boundaries between peripheral and central spaces.

Finally, this research emphasizes the importance of examining everyday practices in understanding urban transformation. By focusing on seemingly marginal spaces such as garages, it becomes possible to uncover complex processes of adaptation, negotiation and meaning-making that might otherwise remain invisible. Future research could further explore similar transformations in other contexts, comparing how different social, economic and regulatory environments shape the domestication of space. In doing so, we may gain a deeper understanding of how ordinary urban actors continuously redefine the cities they inhabit.

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**BELONGING IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY |
HOVATARTOZÁS A BIZONYTALANSÁG IDEJÉN**

Shifting Solidarities: Arab Migrants and Belonging in Contemporary Hungary

Nura Abukhalil



Caption. From Roots of Nations (2025).

Source: www.facebook.com/themotivationjourney

Abstract

This paper examines how Arab migrants in Budapest negotiate identity, belonging, and community under conditions shaped by political uncertainty, anti-immigrant discourse, and broader geopolitical tensions. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2024 and 2025, during the leadership of Viktor Orbán, as well as observations of social media interactions following the subsequent election of Péter Magyar, it explores how everyday practices become sites of boundary-making and subtle resistance. Rather than framing integration as a linear process, the study conceptualizes belonging as a dynamic and relational field in which migrants actively construct, contest, and redefine social boundaries.

The findings highlight the diversity of strategies through which individuals respond to their environment. While some emphasize shared values to reinforce collective identity and community cohesion, others distance themselves from such frameworks, adopting more individualistic or transnational orientations. The Palestinian struggle and LGBTQ+ issues emerge as key sites of conflict and boundary-making, while everyday interactions serve as arenas for negotiating visibility, representation, and autonomy.

By situating these practices within Hungary's shifting political landscape, the paper argues that belonging is continuously reshaped through both present conditions and anticipated futures. In this sense, Arab migrants are not passive subjects of integration but active participants in redefining the social and symbolic boundaries of contemporary Europe.

Keywords: Arab migrants, belonging, Hungary, values, boundary-making

Introduction

Across Europe, migration debates continue to center on the concept of “integration,” often framed as a linear process through which migrants adapt to the norms of host societies. Yet such perspectives tend to obscure the uneven and often exclusionary conditions under which belonging is negotiated. In Hungary, Arab migrants occupy a particularly ambivalent position: while largely absent from public discourse compared to other migrant groups, they remain subject to broader political narratives that frame migrants - especially Muslims - as cultural and moral outsiders. Under the leadership of Viktor Orbán, anti-immigration rhetoric and nationalist policies have contributed to a climate in which belonging is conditional, and difference is highly politicized.

At the same time, global political dynamics intersect with local experiences. The previous Hungarian government’s relations with Benjamin Netanyahu, alongside broader European discourses on migration and security, shapes how Arab identity is perceived and negotiated in everyday life. Migrants find themselves navigating not only local expectations but also transnational narratives that position them within broader geopolitical tensions. These conditions form what can be understood as a context of crisis - not as a singular event, but as an ongoing environment of uncertainty, scrutiny, and contested belonging.

This paper examines how Arab migrants in Budapest respond to these conditions through everyday practices of boundary-making and community formation. Rather than focusing on formal political participation, it explores how identity is constructed, negotiated, and enacted through routine interactions, social networks, and collective spaces. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2024 and 2025, the study shows that individuals who may not describe themselves as political nonetheless engage in practices that shape inclusion and exclusion, define group membership, and challenge dominant representations.

Importantly, the paper highlights the diversity within the Arab migrant population. While some participants emphasize shared values and collective identities, others distance themselves from such frameworks, adopting more individualistic or cosmopolitan orientations. These differences reveal that the community is not a unified entity but a dynamic field of negotiation, where boundaries are continuously drawn, contested, and redefined.

By reframing integration as a process of boundary-making under conditions of crisis, this paper argues that belonging is actively produced rather than passively achieved. Arab migrants in Budapest do not simply adapt to external expectations; they create social worlds, establish networks of support, and articulate alternative forms of belonging that both respond to and reshape the environment in which they live.

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on theories of identity, boundary-making, and everyday politics to understand how belonging is constructed in contexts of migration. Rather than treating identity as a fixed cultural attribute, these approaches emphasize its relational and processual nature.

Fredrik Barth's (1969) work on ethnic boundaries highlights that what sustains group identity is not shared cultural content, but the boundaries that distinguish members from non-members. These boundaries are continuously produced through social interaction, shaping who is included and excluded. Building on this, Richard Jenkins conceptualizes identity as a dynamic interplay between internal self-definition and external categorization. In migration contexts, this dual process becomes particularly salient, as individuals navigate competing expectations and classifications imposed by both their communities and the broader society.

Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory further explains how individuals construct belonging through in-group and out-group distinctions. In contexts of uncertainty or perceived threat, group boundaries often become more pronounced, reinforcing cohesion while simplifying internal diversity. However, such processes are not uniform; individuals may also resist or reinterpret group affiliations, producing varied and sometimes conflicting forms of identification.

Erving Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma and impression management is central to understanding how individuals navigate socially discredited identities. Migrants often manage visibility and invisibility, balancing cultural authenticity with pressures to conform to dominant norms. Killian and Johnson (2006) show how North African women in France counter stigmatization by emphasizing professionalism, education, and moral respectability while downplaying ethnic or religious difference, illustrating both structural constraints and strategic agency. Similarly, Valenta (2009) finds that first-generation immigrants in Norway use humor, withdrawal, and network segregation to

maintain positive identities under exclusion. Together, these studies highlight identity work as a political process embedded in everyday negotiations of unequal power relations.

To move beyond formal understandings of political engagement, this paper also draws on perspectives that conceptualize politics as embedded in everyday life. Scholars such as James Scott (1985) emphasize that seemingly ordinary practices - such as social organization, symbolic expression, or the management of visibility - can carry political significance, particularly in constrained or exclusionary environments. These approaches allow us to understand how migrants engage with broader structures of power not only through overt activism, but through the routines and interactions that shape their daily lives.

Together, these frameworks provide a lens for analyzing how Arab migrants in Budapest construct belonging through boundary-making, negotiate group membership, and respond to exclusion through everyday practices.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative ethnographic research conducted in Budapest between November 2024 and January 2025, followed by dispersed interactions with the community throughout 2025 and 2026. The research combined participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations to explore how Arab migrants experience and negotiate belonging in everyday life.

Fieldwork was primarily carried out through participation in events organized by Roots of Nations (RON), a community initiative that brings together Arab migrants through cultural, social, and professional activities. These events, held in a rented venue in Budapest's 6th district, varied in size and focus, attracting between 10 and 50+ participants. Activities ranged from cultural gatherings and networking sessions to workshops and discussions, providing a rich setting for observing interactions and community dynamics.

In addition to participant observation, the study draws on interviews with organizers and attendees from diverse backgrounds, including students, professionals, and entrepreneurs. The eight (5 female, 3 male) interviewees, aged 28-38, were all first-generation Arab Muslim migrants who have moved to Hungary from different countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Syria) for study through the Stipendium

Hungaricum scholarship (7; 3 of whom switched to a work visa after their studies) or marriage (1). Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences, values, and perceptions of belonging in their own terms. This approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate identity, community, and social boundaries.

The combination of observation and interviews allows for an analysis that captures both collective practices and individual perspectives. Rather than seeking representativeness, the study focuses on depth and variation, highlighting the multiple ways in which belonging is constructed and contested within the Arab migrant community in Budapest.

Findings

Ideological Territories: Values and Boundaries of Belonging

Belonging within the Arab migrant community in Budapest is often articulated through shared values that define group boundaries. Participants described how certain positions - particularly regarding religion, politics, and social norms - functioned as markers of inclusion or exclusion. As one organizer stated, "If someone supports LGBT rights or Zionism, we make it clear they do not have a place within our group." (P2, 35) Such statements illustrate how collective identities can be structured around defined value frameworks. Based on these issues, organizers and participants set boundaries that determine who can be included or excluded from the group (Barth, 1969).

However, these boundaries were not universally accepted. Several participants expressed discomfort with what they perceived as rigid or exclusionary positions. For one interviewee, distancing from community spaces was not a rejection of identity, but a way to maintain autonomy while navigating difference:

I do see the value of being connected to a group... but I do not feel that we share the same values across the board. I believe nobody should be discriminated against because of their race, religion, or sexual orientation... but I am religious at the end of the day, and that means I cannot celebrate certain things. (P4, 29)

These tensions highlight the internal diversity of the community. While some participants reinforced shared values to strengthen cohesion, others challenged or reinterpreted them, leading to varying degrees of engagement. In this sense, the

community emerges not as a unified entity, but as a field of negotiation where boundaries are continuously drawn and contested.

Participants also engaged in practices aimed at reshaping how their identities were perceived externally. Humor, cultural expression, and everyday interactions were used to challenge stereotypes and assert alternative representations. As one participant remarked jokingly, “We Arabs aren’t that bad after all, huh?”, acknowledging dominant narratives while subtly undermining them. Another sought to counteract these stereotypes with representation, commenting: “They often think Arabs are not clean, but whenever I leave an apartment, the owner is very moved. They say, ‘You’ve changed my view of people.’ It is important to me to represent my family and country well.” (P6, 30)

These dynamics reflect how boundary-making operates both internally and externally. Within the community, values define inclusion; in relation to the broader society, they serve as tools for negotiating recognition and visibility.



Note. From *Roots of Nations* (2025). www.facebook.com/themotivationjourney

Social Solidarities: Agency and Everyday Resistance

Alongside internal differentiation, participants actively engaged in building communities that provided support, visibility, and a sense of belonging. These efforts

were particularly evident in organized events, which created spaces for social interaction, cultural expression, and mutual support.

Such initiatives can be understood as responses to the perceived absence of institutional support for integration. By organizing events, sharing resources, and fostering networks, participants created alternative structures that addressed practical and social needs. These spaces also allowed for the expression of cultural identity in ways that might not be possible in broader society. One organizer pointed out the meaning of such communities:

A lot of people were waiting for a chance to find community, connect with people, and make friends. The team brought them together. The group [RON] reminds me of the community back home. Even though we are from different countries, we share the same energy. Being loud, sarcastic, not taking anything seriously, and yet we are very well-educated and can communicate easily. (P2, 35)

At the same time, community-building functioned as a form of everyday resistance. By creating their own spaces, participants challenged the marginalization implied in dominant narratives. Rather than passively adapting to existing structures, they actively shaped their social environment.

Resistance also took more subtle forms. Participants described setting boundaries in social interactions, particularly when faced with intrusive questions about their beliefs or lifestyles. One interviewee noted that while they often attempted to explain their choices, they also emphasized the importance of privacy and mutual respect. Such practices assert autonomy and resist the expectation that migrants must constantly justify themselves.

In addition, some participants expressed broader critiques of migration policies and public discourse. As one interviewee (P7, 28) argued, anti-immigration rhetoric often overlooks the economic and social contributions of migrants, reducing them to simplified narratives. For some, engaging in academic work or public discussion became a way of challenging these narratives and asserting alternative perspectives.

Finally, mobility itself emerged as a form of response. Some participants considered leaving Hungary in search of environments where they felt more accepted or secure. While not always framed as resistance, such decisions reflect an active engagement with structural constraints, highlighting the limits of belonging in certain contexts.

Alongside these practices, participants also reflected on how broader political shifts shape their decisions about settlement and belonging. One organizer emphasized that Hungary's "conservative values" were a key reason she and her husband chose to remain and raise their children in the country, pointing to policies such as restrictions on LGBTQ+ visibility as aligning with their own worldview. By aligning themselves with what they perceive as Hungary's conservative social values, some participants construct belonging through a form of horizontal boundary-making. Rather than negotiating inclusion solely in relation to the Hungarian majority, they position themselves against other marginalized groups, particularly LGBTQ+ communities, whose claims to visibility are viewed as incompatible with their own moral frameworks. In this way, belonging is produced not only through inclusion in the host society but also through relational forms of exclusion that reproduce boundaries familiar from participants' countries of origin.

However, recent political developments introduce new layers of uncertainty. The election of Péter Magyar, alongside evolving European Union pressures on Hungary's domestic policies - including legal challenges to restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights - raises questions about how these alignments may shift. At the same time, political rhetoric emphasizing stricter migration controls, including proposals to limit non-European work permits, signals that structural constraints on migrants may persist or even intensify.

Participants' responses to these developments reflect a mixture of cautious optimism and uncertainty. In online community discussions, some expressed hope that political change might improve economic conditions and social relations, while others remained skeptical about its implications for migrants. The departure from a more overtly divisive political climate has, for some, opened space to reimagine relations with Hungarians in more inclusive terms, framed as shared social belonging rather than opposition.

These developments highlight that boundaries of belonging are not fixed but remain subject to ongoing political and social transformation. As national narratives shift, so too do the conditions under which migrants define their place within society. Whether these changes will lead to greater inclusion or new forms of differentiation remains an open question, pointing to the need to understand belonging as a dynamic and future-oriented process.

Discussion

The findings illustrate how identity, belonging, and resistance are closely intertwined in the everyday lives of Arab migrants in Budapest. Rather than being passive recipients of integration policies or dominant narratives, participants actively negotiate their position through practices of boundary-making and community formation that respond to a broader context of uncertainty and exclusion.

First, identity emerges as a relational and situational process, continuously shaped through interaction. Participants construct boundaries not only in relation to Hungarian society but also within their own communities, drawing lines around shared values, practices, and expectations, illustrating how belonging can be actively defined through exclusion as much as inclusion. At the same time, these boundaries are contested. Others resist such rigidity by distancing themselves from collective spaces or creating further in- and out-groups within the international or Arab community using values like helpfulness or openness. These contrasting positions demonstrate that boundary-making is not a unified process but a field of internal negotiation, where individuals position themselves differently in relation to the group.

Second, the findings highlight how community-making operates as both a response to crisis and a way of reshaping the conditions of belonging. Organized spaces such as RON events provide opportunities for connection, visibility, and mutual support, particularly in a context where institutional forms of integration are perceived as limited or exclusionary. These spaces allow participants to create alternative social environments in which they can define the terms of interaction. At the same time, they also reveal the limits of shared belonging, as not all participants feel equally represented or included within them.

Everyday interactions further show how boundaries are negotiated in relation to the wider society. Participants frequently described the need to manage how they are perceived, often encountering curiosity, misunderstanding, or implicit judgment. As one participant explained, questions such as “Why do you fast?” or “Why don’t you drink?” required them to constantly justify personal choices, even when asked in good faith. In response, some chose to engage and explain, while others emphasized the importance of privacy and mutual respect, asserting that “at the end of the day, that is my private life.” (P6, 30) These moments illustrate how even routine social encounters become sites where belonging is negotiated and limits are drawn.

Finally, the diversity of strategies observed in the study underscores that responses to crisis are neither uniform nor predictable. While some participants invest in community-building and collective identity, others adopt more individualistic or transnational orientations, forming connections beyond ethnic or national lines. In some cases, this includes identifying with broader categories such as “migrants” or emphasizing shared human values over cultural distinctions. In others, it involves disengagement from community spaces perceived as restrictive or unrepresentative.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that belonging is not simply a matter of inclusion within a predefined social order, but an ongoing process of negotiation shaped by both external pressures and internal differences. Boundary-making, community formation, and everyday interaction are not separate processes but interconnected practices through which migrants respond to their environment. In this sense, resistance is not always explicit or collective, but embedded in the ways individuals organize their social worlds, assert autonomy, and redefine the terms on which they engage with others.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how Arab migrants in Budapest respond to conditions of crisis through everyday practices of boundary-making and community formation. By focusing on lived experiences, it has shown that belonging is not a static outcome but an ongoing process shaped by negotiation, adaptation, and resistance. The findings challenge dominant narratives that portray migrants as either passive subjects or culturally homogeneous groups. Instead, they highlight the agency of individuals who actively construct their social worlds, even in the face of uncertainty and constraint.

Recent political changes in Hungary further underscore the fluidity of these processes. As new leadership and shifting policy directions reshape the national landscape, migrants are once again faced with uncertainty regarding their position and future. For some, these changes open possibilities for more inclusive forms of belonging, while for others they challenge previously established alignments, particularly around shared values and social norms. The departure from a more overtly divisive political climate has allowed some to reimagine relations with Hungarians more inclusively, framed as shared belonging rather than opposition.

What emerges from this study is that belonging is not only negotiated in response to present conditions but also continuously reimagined in relation to anticipated futures.

The boundaries that structure inclusion and exclusion are therefore not only socially produced but temporally dynamic, evolving alongside broader political transformations.

While political developments in Hungary may shift over time, the everyday practices identified in this study suggest that migrants will continue to play an active role in shaping the terms of their belonging. In this sense, the margins are not simply spaces of exclusion but sites of transformation, where new forms of identity and community emerge.

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History Versus Humanity: Pandemics as Crises of Identity, Power, and Resistance

Khomotso Marutla



Caption: As communities come together in response to global disease, acts of care, resistance, and solidarity become central to the ways identities are formed, challenged, and reimagined during times of crisis.

Source: <https://www.dreamstime.com/international-human-solidarity-day-concept-human-hands-shape-heart-unity-world-peace-humanity-concept-world-environment-day-image167374080>

Abstract

Pandemics are not solely biomedical events, they are profound social crises that reshape identities, hierarchies, and collective meaning-making. This article examines pandemics through an anthropological lens, arguing that they function as moments of rupture that destabilise existing social orders while simultaneously producing new forms of identity and resistance. Drawing on comparative historical analysis of the Black Death, the 1918 Influenza Pandemic, HIV/AIDS, and COVID-19, the study integrates crisis theory, biopolitics, and resistance theory. According to Drake et al (2012) it demonstrates that pandemics generate not only economic disruption and social fragmentation but also diverse forms of resistance from everyday acts of non-compliance to organised activism that challenge authority and reshape knowledge systems. Ultimately, pandemics reveal the dynamic interplay between power, identity, and human agency.

Keywords: Pandemics, Crisis, Identity, Resistance, Power

Introduction

The globalised world finds itself in a continuous cycle of creating events that make an impact on its current people, environment, and history. This normally breeds debates and discussions on the impacts that the event creates. Whether these impacts are positive or negative depends on the scholar, the era, and the overall perspective of where the sources lie. This means that events that make it into future textbooks are currently being created within the cycle mentioned. The world, in this never-ending cycle, is currently doing what it is undoubtedly great at: Making History. In recent years, at the end of the 2010's and the beginning of the 2020's, the world had to relearn the cycle of history-making known as a pandemic. Pandemics occupy a unique position in human history as recurring yet disruptive phenomena that expose the fragility of social systems. While often framed in epidemiological terms, pandemics are equally social and cultural events that reshape how individuals and communities understand themselves and others (Abeyasinghe, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic, emerging in late 2019, provides a contemporary entry point into this discussion. However, rather than treating it as an isolated event, this paper situates COVID-19 within a broader historical continuum of pandemics. By doing so, it becomes possible to identify recurring patterns in how societies respond to large-scale disease outbreaks (Garrett, 2007). By May of 2020, the world had had its full course of the pandemic and its consequences. This paper was inspired by the COVID-19 era and various other historical biological crises around the world. This paper argues that the social sciences often do not focus on diseases as crises. Therefore this paper aims to focus on seeking an answer to: How have pandemics historically functioned as crises, and how have they reshaped social identities and generated resistance? It argues that pandemics simultaneously produce disruption, reconfiguration, and resistance, generating both exclusionary practices and new forms of collective identity (Scott, 1985).

Theoretical Framework and Methodology: Crisis, Identity, and Resistance

Anthropologically, a crisis is not merely an event but a process that disrupts the structures of everyday life. Turner (1969) conceptualises crises as liminal moments, in which normal social orders are suspended and reconfigured. Identity, in this context, is socially constructed and continuously negotiated (Hall, 1996). During pandemics, identity categories such as race, class, and morality become intensified and politicised. From a biopolitical perspective, states exercise power through the regulation of bodies and

populations, particularly during health crises (Foucault, 1978). Pandemics justify surveillance, restriction of movement, and public health interventions that reshape social life. However, power is never absolute as Scott (1985) argues that individuals engage in everyday forms of resistance, subtly contesting authority through non-compliance, reinterpretation, and adaptation. Mbembe (2003) extends this by showing how crises determine who is allowed to live and who is left to die, highlighting the uneven distribution of vulnerability during pandemics. This is also echoed by Moore (1987). Together, these perspectives demonstrate that pandemics are sites where power, identity, and resistance intersect.

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive anthropological methodology, combining comparative historical analysis and thematic interpretation of secondary sources (Price-Smith, 2008). The research draws on historical case studies of the Black Death, the 1918 influenza, HIV/AIDS, and COVID-19 to identify recurring themes such as stigma, economic disruption, and resistance. This approach aligns with historical anthropology, emphasising how cultural meanings and social structures evolve over time (Hughes, 2006).

Defining Pandemics as Social Phenomena

What Defines a Pandemic?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), a pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease. Green et al (2002) argue that it is an epidemic (the extremely fast spread of a disease to a large number of people in a given population within a short period) that spreads worldwide. Most Pandemics are born as an epidemic and turn into Pandemics when it crosses multiple lands, seas, and nations. Pandemics are usually globally noticed and go through a spectrum of mild to severe, depending on the symptoms. For example, the world was fighting a war in 2009 against the N1H1 Influenza strain and although it spread worldwide, its impact and infection rate was quite mild. This does not necessarily mean that all pandemics do not pose a danger to society but that their impact varies. The word *pandemic* has historically had negative connotations as it was a major cause in worldwide deaths at a certain time in history. This does not mean we should shy away from the word but should instead try to define it further. Essentially, pandemic was an uncontrollable epidemic that spread rather fast throughout the world. As mentioned above pandemics are categorised according to many requirements and the type of danger

that they pose. However, there are characteristics that all pandemics have, and this is what sets them apart from other forms of spread of disease. For the purposes of the essay and according to Day et al (2006) , the characteristics of a pandemic will include, but not be limited to: the worldwide spread of novel influenza strains for which most of the population lacks substantial immunity, the pandemic strains typically cause high illness and mortality rates, they tend to drive previous strains of the influenza virus to extinction, influenza pandemics cannot be predicted with certainty, the disease must be highly infectious, there is no cure for it, and their consequences and/or impacts should be visible within history.

For epidemics to graduate into a pandemic, they should be spread worldwide, have a high mortality rate that should indicate its presence, it must drive out a prior strain of influenza (as in the case with SARS and MERS) it should have an unpredictability to its occurrence, it should be highly infectious and should have impacts that shape human history. Pandemics must also be understood as total social phenomena that affect economic systems, cultural practices, and political structures (Abeyasinghe, 2013). This, therefore also includes: global spread, high uncertainty, social disruption, stigma and moral panic, and long-term historical impact

Case Studies: Crisis, Identity, and Transformation

As stated, before pandemics are not anything new to the world. Several pandemics occurred even in the ancient times where the population was not as large as what we have today. It is not that Earth-altering to learn that the world seems to never be prepared for something that seems to repeat itself. Pandemics are as natural as the water cycle and have become historical events that shape future peoples.

The Black Death as a Pandemic

Between the years of 1346 and 1353, the world was exposed to a Bubonic Plague characterised by its rapid killing power resulting in the world's highest mortality rates in history with almost 200 million deaths worldwide. This Plague would be known as the Black Death. This pandemic's claim to fame lies in its extremely high mortality rate. The Plague was the epitome of a Pandemic. The plague affected most of the continents, starting in East or Central Asia and eventually making its way to Northern Africa due to the Silk Road (A road used for trading and traveling in Eurasia). The plague saw some of the highest infection and illness rates as well as mortality rates in one century alone if not

in all human history so far. It was evitable as the circumstances in the era allowed little to no hygiene. Valtuena and other scholars (Valtuena, 2017) state that it was also the second pandemic to strike the world and left about 30% to 60% of Europe's population decreased.

While applying the definition stated in the essay, it is without a doubt that the Black Death was a Pandemic. The disease was spread worldwide at an extremely rapid pace. The mortality and illness rates were astronomical and speaks for itself. It drove out the first plague which occurred during the Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age. It was something that could not be predicted as no signs were seen and no prior knowledge of pandemics could have helped the people of the era. Also, the symptoms and the extremely high infectiousness account for the Black Death being one of the most severe pandemics in human History.

The consequences of the Black Death had its impact on that era's society. Some of them were somewhat positive, for example, a large population decline resulted in wages being at a high due to the labour shortages but some consequences were negative as they also lost revenue as many people could no longer afford their housing so landowners were forced to substitute rent with labour. Environmentally, some historians believe that the deaths helped the Earth cool down and triggered reforestation which led to the Little Ice Age. Socially the need to find a reason for the plague led to many people, such as the Jews, beggars, and foreigners, being blamed for its occurrence. The Black Death (1346–1353) resulted in unprecedented mortality, killing up to 60% of Europe's population (Britannica, n.d.).

Its impacts included:

- Labour restructuring and rising wages (Clark, 2007)
- Religious crisis and declining institutional trust
- Scapegoating of minority groups (Moore, 1987)

This pandemic illustrates how crisis produces both structural change and social exclusion.

The 1918 Influenza as a Pandemic

In 1918 the European countries of Spain, France, Britain, and Italy experienced the brunt of The First World War and the influenza pandemic of 1918 with the consequences being dire resulting in almost 50 million deaths worldwide. The socio-economic consequences were also massive. As stated above the worldwide spread, the high illness and infection rate and the mortality rate, its unpredictable occurrence, its high infectiousness as well as its historical impact classify The 1918 Influenza as a pandemic.

The impacts or consequences were dire as well, resulting in again, both negative and positive impacts. Many scholars believe that the virus helped unbalance the power struggle between the Central Powers and the Allied Powers as the virus hit Germany and Austria the hardest with a higher mortality rate than Britain and France. Within the economic sector, many industries had to adjust to revenue losses while the healthcare sector gained profits. The 1918 Influenza also had an unusual effect. Many historians agree that it was a widely forgotten pandemic since it was occurring during the First World War which overshadowed it as a historical event. The 1918 influenza pandemic caused approximately 50 million deaths worldwide (Garrett, 2007).

Its effects included:

- Economic disruption
- Strain on healthcare systems
- Historical marginalization due to World War I

HIV/AIDS as a Pandemic

A disease covered in conspiracy, stigma, discrimination, constant questioning, and myth, HIV/AIDS, is one of the most important ongoing disease pandemics that continue to shape the history that the world has created. Undoubtedly, HIV/AIDS is a pandemic that continuously still shapes world history. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency (AIDS) is several conditions caused by an infection with HIV and although it is still going, it is still a massive role player in recent and current history.

One of the most scandalous pandemics discussed, HIV/AIDS does not lie with the strict definition that the essay has given pandemics, this does not mean that it is not a pandemic. From its discovery and identification in the early 1980s to 2018, AIDS has caused almost 32 million deaths worldwide, making it one of the reasons as to why it should be considered a pandemic.

It is also the only pandemic that is the most personal and requires a lot of intimacy when compared to other pandemics. As HIV/AIDS is not airborne and requires more than a cough or sneeze to be infectious, its transmissions are mostly through bodily fluids that exclude saliva, sweat and tears since it is a retrovirus. Like other pandemics, HIV/AIDS has no cure or vaccine but has the most efficient medication to slow its course due to the constant study of the disease.

HIV/AIDS is unique in that most of its impacts are socially and culturally constructed. The pandemic fuels discrimination, rejection, and a created stigma against the queer community and other members of society who practice various forms of sex work. It is often accompanied by avoidance of HIV/AIDS infected people and violence against the infected. These are some of the impacts that the infected have to live with, the fear as well that comes with all pandemics is more concentrated within the HIV/AIDS pandemic as it is not only the disease one should worry about but also the perception of society that can lead to depression or avoiding seeking treatment and eventually death as people no longer take their medication for a somewhat chronic disease. HIV/AIDS has caused over 32 million deaths globally and unlike airborne pandemics, HIV/AIDS produced:

- Intense stigma toward LGBTQ+ communities (Sepkowitz, 2001)
- Moralisation of disease
- Activism and identity-based resistance

This pandemic demonstrates how crisis can generate **both marginalisation and empowerment**.

Corona Virus is a Pandemic

It is without a doubt that the Corona Virus is a pandemic. It has managed to turn from an epidemic into a world-class pandemic between November of 2019 and May 2020. From these dates alone, there were 6.19 million active cases and almost 4 hundred thousand deaths. The high illness rate and rapidly rising mortality rates cement its pandemic status. It has succeeded in breeding out most strains of influenza. Its unpredictability regardless of the world having large experience with pandemics determines it as a pandemic. It is highly infectious and very much airborne and so far, has no cure against its pandemic

power. Lastly, and most importantly it is currently creating history for future people to learn about. In all aspects, it is a pandemic.

The severity of the situation soon escalated and mirrored past pandemics. It is now safe to assume that although history might not repeat itself, it sure does have similar aspects. The impact the pandemics have historically had on human history is also seemingly replicating itself. Like a pandemic, COVID-19 has had a historical impact. At this moment, we are unsure of the silver lining that might present itself. Furthermore, to create a better lesson, it is important to note that the world moves fast and various important events tend to occur simultaneously. The only hope we have is to avoid the emphasis of one event over the other, such as when COVID-19 overshadowed the Black Lives Matter Movement occurring at the same time.

COVID-19 has already had its impacts. At some point during the pandemic, the price of gold and oil plummeted resulting in fear and again, fewer investments. Secondly, many felt trapped within their homes when certain restrictions were put in place to curb the spread. The rumoured nation (China) which was said to be responsible for the spread of the virus were also discriminated against and were subjugated to racism as the situation became worldwide. With all these factors considered, it is no surprise that COVID-19 has gone in history as a pandemic. COVID-19 represents a contemporary global crisis with wide-ranging impacts:

- Economic instability
- Social isolation
- Racialized discrimination

Resistance in Times of Pandemic

Everyday Resistance

Everyday resistance constitutes one of the most pervasive yet often overlooked forms of response during pandemics. Rather than manifesting as overt political confrontation, it operates through subtle, routine practices by which individuals negotiate and sometimes subvert imposed regulations. As Scott (1985) argues, these “weapons of the weak” are embedded in daily life and reflect pragmatic strategies for maintaining autonomy under conditions of constraint. During pandemics, such resistance frequently emerges in the selective adherence to public health measures, where individuals comply with certain

regulations while quietly disregarding others that conflict with their immediate needs or social realities. For example, informal workers may continue operating despite lockdown restrictions, not out of defiance per se, but as a necessary means of survival. Similarly, individuals may reinterpret guidelines in ways that allow them to sustain social relationships, cultural rituals, or religious practices, even when these are formally prohibited.

Anthropologically, these practices highlight the gap between policy and lived experience. Public health measures are often designed at the level of the state or global institutions, assuming a degree of uniformity in how populations can respond. However, everyday resistance reveals that individuals engage with these measures through the lens of their own socio-economic positions, cultural values, and immediate constraints. What may appear as non-compliance from an institutional perspective can instead be understood as a rational and contextually grounded response to competing demands. In this sense, everyday resistance is not simply oppositional but adaptive, reflecting the ways in which people navigate the tensions between authority, survival, and identity. It underscores that even in highly regulated contexts, individuals retain a degree of agency that shapes how pandemics are experienced on the ground.

Collective Resistance

While everyday resistance operates at the micro level, pandemics also give rise to more organised and visible forms of collective resistance. These forms often emerge when structural inequalities and institutional failures become particularly pronounced, prompting coordinated efforts to challenge authority and demand change. The HIV/AIDS pandemic provides a paradigmatic example, as activist movements fundamentally transformed the relationship between patients, medical institutions, and the state. Faced with widespread stigma, limited access to treatment, and governmental neglect, affected communities mobilised to demand recognition, resources, and rights (Sepkowitz, 2001). In doing so, they not only resisted marginalisation but also reshaped the production of medical knowledge, insisting on the inclusion of patient experiences in research and policy-making processes.

This form of resistance illustrates how pandemics can act as catalysts for new forms of political subjectivity. Individuals who were previously marginalised or excluded become organised actors capable of influencing public discourse and institutional

practices. During COVID-19, similar dynamics were evident in the emergence of diverse forms of collective action, ranging from protests against state-imposed restrictions to grassroots mutual aid networks that provided support outside formal systems. This serves to highlight the multiplicity of resistance, which can take both oppositional and cooperative forms. While some movements directly challenge state authority, others operate parallel to it, filling gaps left by institutional inadequacies. In both cases, collective resistance demonstrates that pandemics are not only sites of vulnerability but also of mobilisation, where new forms of solidarity and political engagement are forged.

Epistemic Resistance

Resistance during pandemics is not confined to behavior or political organization, it also manifests in the realm of knowledge, where competing interpretations of disease challenge dominant scientific and institutional narratives. This form of resistance, often referred as epistemic resistance, reflects the inherently contested nature of truth during periods of crisis. While biomedical knowledge plays a central role in shaping public health responses, it is not universally accepted or uncritically adopted. Instead, individuals and communities actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes reject official accounts, drawing on alternative frameworks of understanding that may include cultural beliefs, historical experiences, and localized knowledge systems (Abeyasinghe, 2013).

Anthropologically, this contestation underscores that knowledge is never neutral but is embedded within broader relations of power. Scientific authority is often associated with state institutions and global organizations, which may not always be perceived as legitimate or trustworthy by all populations. As a result, resistance can take the form of skepticism toward official guidelines, the circulation of alternative narratives, or the prioritization of experiential knowledge over expert advice. While some of these forms, particularly misinformation, can have harmful consequences, they nonetheless reveal important dynamics about how people make sense of uncertainty and risk. Epistemic resistance thus highlights that pandemics are not only biological events but also discursive struggles over meaning, legitimacy, and authority. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing more nuanced and culturally sensitive responses to global health crises.

Resistance and Inequality

Resistance in the context of pandemics cannot be understood in isolation from the broader structures of inequality that shape both vulnerability and agency. The capacity to comply with or resist public health measures is unevenly distributed, reflecting disparities in economic resources, social position, and political power. For many individuals, particularly those in precarious or marginalized circumstances, compliance with restrictions such as lockdowns or social distancing is not always feasible. Informal workers, for instance, may depend on daily income to survive, making adherence to stay-at-home orders economically untenable. In such cases, what is framed as resistance may in fact be a necessity imposed by structural conditions rather than a deliberate act of defiance.

At the same time, these inequalities are often reinforced through the differential application of control measures. Marginalized populations are more likely to be subjected to surveillance, policing, and punitive enforcement, highlighting the asymmetrical nature of biopolitical power (Mbembe, 2003). This dynamic reveals that pandemics do not affect all populations equally; rather, they amplify existing hierarchies and expose the uneven distribution of life chances. Resistance, in this context, becomes both a response to and a critique of these inequalities. It draws attention to the ways in which certain groups are disproportionately burdened by crisis while having limited capacity to influence decision-making processes.

By situating resistance within the framework of inequality and power, it becomes clear that acts of defiance, adaptation, or negotiation are deeply embedded in social structures. They are not merely individual choices but are shaped by broader systems that determine who can afford to comply and who must resist. This perspective reinforces the central argument of the paper: that pandemics are not only crises of health but also of identity and power, in which resistance plays a critical role in revealing and reshaping the contours of social life.

Discussion: Pandemics as Liminal Arenas of Crisis, Identity, and Resistance

When examined comparatively, pandemics reveal themselves as fundamentally liminal events that disrupt established social orders while opening spaces for transformation. Turner's (1969) concept of liminality is particularly useful here, as it captures the ambiguity and instability that characterize pandemic conditions. During such periods, the

norms and structures that typically govern social life are suspended or reconfigured, creating both uncertainty and possibility. It is within this liminal space that identities are renegotiated, as individuals and groups are forced to reconsider their positions in relation to shifting categories of risk, responsibility, and belonging. Pandemics expose the constructed nature of these categories, revealing how distinctions such as “healthy” and “infected,” “essential” and “non-essential,” or “safe” and “dangerous” are socially produced and politically mediated rather than purely objective.

At the same time, pandemics intensify the exercise of power, particularly through biopolitical mechanisms that seek to regulate populations in the name of health and security (Foucault, 1978). Measures such as quarantine, surveillance, and vaccination campaigns reflect attempts to manage life at the level of the population, often prioritizing collective outcomes over individual autonomy. However, as the previous section has demonstrated, these mechanisms are never uncontested. Resistance emerges as an integral component of the pandemic experience, shaping how policies are implemented, interpreted, and ultimately transformed. The interaction between control and resistance produces a dynamic field in which power is continuously negotiated rather than unilaterally imposed.

Furthermore, pandemics illuminate the uneven distribution of vulnerability and the ways in which crises amplify existing inequalities. Mbembe’s (2003) concept of necropolitics is particularly relevant in this regard, as it highlights how certain populations are rendered more expendable than others. Decisions about resource allocation, access to healthcare, and mobility restrictions often disproportionately affect marginalized groups, reinforcing structural hierarchies even as they are challenged. Resistance, in this context, becomes both a response to and a critique of these inequalities, drawing attention to the moral and political dimensions of pandemic governance.

Ultimately, pandemics should be understood not as isolated disruptions but as processes that reveal the underlying dynamics of society. They bring into sharp relief the relationships between power, identity, and agency, demonstrating how these elements are continuously shaped through interaction. By framing pandemics as liminal arenas, this analysis moves beyond simplistic narratives of crisis and recovery, instead emphasizing the ongoing processes of negotiation and transformation that define human responses to disease.

Conclusion

Pandemics occupy a paradoxical position in human history: they are moments of profound disruption that simultaneously generate new forms of order. As this paper has demonstrated, they cannot be adequately understood through biomedical frameworks alone. Instead, they must be approached as complex social phenomena that reshape identities, redistribute power, and provoke diverse forms of resistance. Through an anthropological lens, pandemics emerge as critical sites in which the fundamental structures of society are exposed, contested, and reconfigured.

The comparative analysis of the Black Death, the Spanish Flu, HIV/AIDS, and COVID-19 reveals consistent patterns across time and space. Each pandemic produced significant economic and social upheaval, destabilizing existing systems while creating new opportunities for transformation. At the same time, each generated forms of stigma and exclusion that reinforced social boundaries, demonstrating the persistence of inequality even in moments of shared crisis. However, these patterns are only part of the story. Equally important are the ways in which individuals and communities responded to these conditions, asserting agency through both subtle and overt forms of resistance. Whether through everyday acts of non-compliance, organized activism, or challenges to dominant knowledge systems, resistance played a central role in shaping the outcomes of each pandemic.

By integrating resistance into the analysis, this paper moves beyond portrayals of populations as passive victims of disease and instead highlights their active participation in the production of social reality. This shift is crucial for understanding not only the historical impacts of pandemics but also their ongoing significance in the present. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, the dynamics of crisis, identity, and resistance continue to unfold in complex and often unpredictable ways, reflecting broader tensions within global society.

In conclusion, pandemics do not simply alter the course of history; they reveal the processes through which history is made. They expose the fragility of existing structures while simultaneously demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of human communities. It is within this interplay between disruption and response, between crisis, identity, and resistance, that the enduring significance of pandemics can be fully understood.

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EVERYDAY PRACTICES OF COPING | A MEGKÜZDÉS HÉTKÖZNAPI GYAKORLATAI

The Untold Peace: Indigenous *Suku Anak Dalam* Women and Everyday Ecological Security amid the Banality of *Indonesia Emas*

Herlina Dedy Listiani, Anna Christi Suwardi, Wahyu Candra Dewi



Caption: A tarpaulin-roofed hut like this is often used as a space for women to “withdraw” during menstruation and postpartum periods. Some SAD community members, including Induk F, who refused government-provided housing, also choose to live in tarpaulin-roofed homes like this (Field Notes, 2024).

Source: Photograph from the author's archive

Abstract

As the expansion of palm oil plantations and industrial forestry projects massively compresses spaces of livelihood, women of the Indigenous *Suku Anak Dalam* (SAD) in Jambi Province, sustain life through everyday practices of ecological care grounded in bodies, food, forests, and intergenerational knowledge. This article recognizes these practices as forms of ecological peace that nurture everyday life security beyond state-centric security paradigms namely the *Indonesia Emas* (Golden Indonesia). Drawing on secondary data and fragments of earlier direct conversations, the article mobilizes Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil to examine how the *Indonesia Emas* agenda operates as a technocratic discourse that normalizes extractive violence through bureaucratic routines and future-oriented optimism. While the marginalization of SAD is not new, *Indonesia Emas* marks a phase in which such violence becomes administratively formalized, with disproportionate consequences for women's lives. By centering non-performative Indigenous women's leadership, this article reclaims care, peace, and security as feminist political practices systematically excluded from dominant development imaginaries.

Keywords: Indigenous women; *Suku Anak Dalam*; ecological care; extractivism; banality of development; critical feminism, *Indonesia Emas*

Introduction

Inhabiting Jambi Province, Sumatra Island, the lives of *Suku Anak Dalam* (SAD) women have emerged from an intimate relationship with the forest, a relationship that today is increasingly fractured by the fragmentation of living space. As a nomadic community, the forest once constituted a collective living territory, yet the massive expansion of oil palm plantations and industrial timber estates has severed the relationship between women's bodies, food systems, and the ecological landscape. For SAD women, the forest is not merely a natural backdrop, but a relational space through which knowledge of food, medicine, and life rhythms is transmitted through everyday practices. Women's bodies, land, and forest form an interconnected unity that mutually sustains one another within a system of life that cannot be separated without generating ecological and social harm (Ginting et al., 2025; Shiva, 1991).

Within these everyday practices, SAD women, particularly the *Induk*, hold a central role as custodians of food and health knowledge, as well as stewards of human–nature relations. *Induk*, or *Ibu*, is the term used by SAD communities to refer to women who have children, as well as to elder women. They determine what may be taken, when it is sufficient, and how to ensure that the forest continues to provide. Research on Indigenous *Orang Rimba*, an integral part of SAD, shows that these practices are not remnants of the past, but rather adaptive and sustainable life strategies amid increasing external pressures (Cahyadi & Setiadi, 2022; Sager, 2008, 2017; Takiddin, 2014). *Orang Rimba* and *Suku Anak Dalam* literally refer to the same group, although the terminology has shifted, particularly since the emergence of development discourse in Indonesia during the 1700–1800s (Tirtosudarmo, 2022). However, this shift has not altered the position of Indigenous women within mainstream development narratives, where they are often framed as backward and in need of assistance, rather than as subjects possessing agency, ecological knowledge, and political legitimacy. This study uses the term “*Suku Anak Dalam* (SAD)” in accordance with community consent in the field, as it is the term they commonly use.

The reality of the pressures shaping SAD women's lives and relationships did not emerge suddenly. As argued by Li (2014) capitalist expansion into customary forest territories unfolds through gradual processes that mobilize legal and administrative language to transform land into a commodity. In Jambi Province, this restructuring of land use has resulted in the conversion of over one million hectares of forest, out of roughly

five million hectares into oil palm plantations, reflecting not only the scale of territorial reorganization for extractive production but also the material conditions of dispossession that disproportionately reshape women's access to land, food, and autonomy (Maulida, 2025). For SAD women, this process entails the shrinking of living space, the loss of forest-based food sources, and heightened health vulnerability. Studies on the impacts of palm oil expansion in Jambi demonstrate that women bear layered burdens, manifested in the loss of non-market economic access, increased domestic labor, and weakened bargaining power within households (Azzahra et al., 2017). Ironically, this suffering is rarely recognized as a structural crisis because women's labor is positioned outside the state's definition of recognized production.

It is here that the central tension of this article emerges: women's ecological care work confronts an extractive development logic that evaluates both nature and human life through metrics of efficiency and growth. Feminist literature has long demonstrated that women's environmental knowledge is frequently excluded from policy arenas, dismissed as unscientific, unproductive, or politically irrelevant (Agarwal, 1992, 2010). Within the framework of feminist political ecology, this exclusion is understood as a form of epistemic violence, the erasure of ways of knowing and caring for the world that do not align with dominant development rationalities (Elmhirst, 2015). The violence experienced by SAD, particularly women, therefore, is not only the material loss of forests, but also the erasure of their knowledge from the political imagination of the state. This article concurs that violence is not merely a term describing physical harm, but encompasses structural violence manifested through the penetration of state power into vulnerable communities, marked by resource dispossession, unequal power relations, and discursive marginalization (Huang & Xu, 2025).

Tracing the common thread of this bitter reality, the *Indonesia Emas* agenda in contemporary Indonesia becomes an important temporal frame for critical reading. In this article, *Indonesia Emas* is treated as a temporal language of development, rather than as a standalone policy period. This article does not claim that violence and marginalization of SAD women originate from this agenda. On the contrary, such violence has long been embedded in the extended history of extractive development in customary forest regions. It is important to emphasize that *Indonesia Emas* functions as a contemporary development language through which this article argues that long-standing violence is normalized. Through targets, indicators, and technocratic visions, the

suffering of Indigenous women is framed as an unavoidable administrative consequence of progress.

This article approaches the experiences of SAD women through a feminist and decolonial framework that brings together discussions of the *banality of evil* from Hannah Arendt, ecological care, and relational understandings of peace and security. Rather than treating development solely as economic transformation, the article examines how administrative practices, care labor, and everyday survival become central sites through which violence, security, and the continuity of life are negotiated. These theoretical orientations are elaborated further in the following section. This research, therefore, advances two main research questions. *First*, how are the ecological care practices of SAD women framed, erased, and depoliticized within contemporary extractive development discourse? *Second*, how does the language of development, particularly within the *Indonesia Emas* agenda, render violence against Indigenous women banal and invisible? Through these questions, this article firmly positions SAD women as political subjects whose knowledge continues to be negotiated and marginalized. Methodologically, this study employs a critical and interpretive feminist approach with a reflexive ethnographic sensibility. The analysis draws on secondary data and fragments of previous conversations between the researcher and SAD women, used as reflective reinforcement. This approach opens space to read development not as a neutral project, but as a political arena that determines who is cared for, who is erased, and whose lives are deemed worthy of being sustained.

Thus, this article ultimately offers a reconceptualization of security as everyday ecological care practices sustained by SAD women. By bringing together the concepts of banality and care, this article proposes a critical reading of the *Indonesia Emas* agenda as a form of banality that is, a contemporary development language that normalizes and depoliticizes longstanding violence against Indigenous women through seemingly ordinary administrative procedures. Building on this analysis, the article adopts the title “The Untold Peace: Indigenous *Suku Anak Dalam* Women and Everyday Ecological Security amid the Banality of Indonesia Emas” to underscore that the ecological care practices of Indigenous women produce a form of peace that is never narrated, yet continuously sustained as a condition for the continuity of life.

Banality, Care, and Everyday Ecological Security

Development often arrives through the language of promise, inter alia, indicators, targets, and visions of the future, which present progress as something measurable, rational, and inevitable. Within contemporary Indonesia, the discourse of *Indonesia Emas 2045* embodies this optimism through narratives of economic transformation, competitiveness, and modernization (Kementrian PPN, 2025). Yet beneath this future-oriented language lies another reality that is rarely counted: the gradual erosion of relationships that sustain life. Forests disappear not only as ecological territories, but also as spaces of food, medicine, memory, and care. For Indigenous *Suku Anak Dalam* (SAD) women, this erosion reveals that violence does not always arrive dramatically. Rather, it often unfolds quietly through ordinary administrative procedures and normalized development routines. To understand this process, this article brings into dialogue four interconnected conceptual traditions: the banality of evil, feminist political ecology, feminist theories of care, and feminist perspectives on peace and security. Together, these frameworks illuminate how development violence operates not only through material dispossession, but also through the erasure of ecological relationships and everyday labor that sustain life.

The concept of the banality of evil, introduced by Arendt (2006), provides an important starting point. Arendt argues that violence is not always driven by hatred or extraordinary cruelty, but may emerge through bureaucratic routines carried out without ethical reflection. Violence becomes banal when it is embedded within procedures that appear normal, technical, and morally distant. In development contexts, this banality appears when dispossession is translated into neutral administrative language. Forest destruction becomes “land optimization,” displacement becomes “relocation,” and suffering becomes an acceptable consequence of progress. Gupta (2012) further shows how bureaucratic systems create distance between policy and lived experience, while Ferguson, (1994) explains how development discourse depoliticizes structural violence by framing it as a technical issue rather than a political problem.

Within the framework of *Indonesia Emas*, this banality emerges through the normalization of extractive transformation as a national necessity. Violence against Indigenous communities does not disappear, but becomes absorbed into optimistic narratives of development and modernization. The loss of forests, food systems, and ecological relationships experienced by SAD women becomes difficult to recognize as

violence precisely because it is embedded within ordinary policy processes. At the same time, this violence is deeply gendered. Feminist political ecology emphasizes that environmental change is inseparable from unequal relations of power, labor, and knowledge (Agarwal, 1992; Elmhirst, 2015). Forests are not merely physical landscapes, but lived spaces through which relationships between bodies, food, health, and survival are continuously negotiated. For SAD women, ecological knowledge is embedded within everyday practices such as gathering food, identifying medicinal plants, and caring for family and community life. Women's bodies and forests therefore become relationally connected, materially and politically.

Feminist political ecology also highlights that development not only reorganizes access to resources, but determines which forms of knowledge are considered legitimate. Knowledge rooted in care and ecological intimacy is frequently dismissed as unscientific or unproductive because it does not conform to dominant development logics (Agarwal, 1992; Elmhirst, 2015). As a result, the violence experienced by SAD women is simultaneously ecological and epistemic: forests disappear while the knowledge sustaining relationships with those forests is rendered invisible. From this departure, this article understands care not as apolitical domestic labor, but as a political practice that sustains the continuity of life (De La Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). Care work unfolds through repetitive and often invisible acts such as preparing food, maintaining health, protecting children, and preserving ecological balance. For SAD women, caring for the forest means sustaining the conditions through which collective life remains possible. Their care practices interrupt extractive logics by prioritizing relational survival over efficiency and accumulation.

This understanding further connects to feminist perspectives on peace and security. Feminist security studies challenge state-centric notions of security focused on territorial stability and institutional order, instead placing everyday life and vulnerability at the center of analysis (Sjoberg, 2009). Security, in this sense, refers to the capacity to sustain relationships, bodies, and collective continuity. Peace is similarly understood not as the absence of conflict, but as everyday labor that prevents life from collapsing amid ongoing structural violence (Vaittinen et al., 2021).

Bringing these perspectives together, this article argues that the banality of development operates through the erasure of care and ecological relationality. The language of development normalizes violence by framing dispossession as progress while

obscuring the labor required to sustain life amid ecological destruction. Analytically, the concept of banality is used to examine how violence becomes normalized through development language and administrative routines. Feminist political ecology is employed to interpret the gendered consequences of ecological transformation and the marginalization of Indigenous women's knowledge. Care theory enables the reading of everyday practices as political labor, while feminist security perspectives frame these practices as forms of ecological peace and security. Through this conceptual dialogue, SAD women emerge not merely as vulnerable subjects of development, but as political actors whose everyday practices reveal the ethical limits of extractive futures.

Research Methods

This paper is grounded in a critical and interpretive feminist approach combined with a reflexive ethnographic sensibility. While critical feminism is employed to read development as a practice of power operating through language, categories, and administrative procedures that determine who is recognized and who is silenced (Agarwal, 2010; Elmhirst, 2015), The interpretive approach is used to understand how the ecological care practices of SAD women are lived, interpreted, and experienced in everyday life. This approach does not aim to explain Indigenous women's experiences through variables or indicators, but rather to interpret the relational meanings of care toward the forest, food, the body, and the community as ways of life embedded within values, memory, and ecological knowledge.

This article adopted a reflexive field-based feminist approach informed by situated engagement with SAD communities. Following Haraway (2018) notion of situated knowledge, the article understands knowledge as partial, relational, and shaped through embodied encounters rather than detached observation. Behar's (1998) emphasis on reflexive interpretation further informs the article's attention to vulnerability, proximity, and the limits of representation. The field engagement informing this article was primarily conducted by the second author through periodic engagements between November 2023 and February 2024 in Merangin Regency, Jambi. These engagements emerged within the context of the *Re-grow Initiative*, a community-based project facilitated by DEEP EnGender focusing on ecological livelihood and relational engagement with Indigenous communities. The engagement process included dialogue forums, informal everyday interactions, conversations, observations, and community activities

with SAD women and families. The second author was born and raised in Merangin Regency and lived in close proximity to SAD communities for nearly twenty years. While this article does not position such proximity as insider authority, this long-term contextual familiarity contributed to relational sensitivity and contextual understanding throughout the engagement process. The second author was also responsible for field documentation and the final supervision of the empirical materials used in this article. Meanwhile, the first author contributed to the initial conceptual framing, theoretical interpretation, and analytical reflection of the manuscript, while the third author contributed through collaborative interpretation, particularly regarding the broader context of Indonesian development and policy discourse.

The analysis in this article is primarily based on secondary data, including academic journal articles, state policy and planning documents, reports from civil society organizations, and online media coverage. These sources are read as political texts that contain particular assumptions, languages, and imaginaries about development, progress, and the future. State documents, including contemporary development agendas, are not used to evaluate program success, but rather to trace how structural violence is normalized through administrative language that appears rational and impersonal (Ferguson, 1994; Gupta, 2012). As reflective reinforcement, this article also draws on conversational fragments, reflective field notes, and observations developed through situated encounters with SAD communities during the November 2023–February 2024 engagement period. There are eight key figures represented in these fragments, whose identities are anonymized using initials: *Induk A*, *Induk B*, *Induk C*, *Induk D*, *Bapak E*, *Induk F*, *Induk G*, and *Ibu H*. All are members of the SAD community, except for *Ibu H*, a community teacher who has long accompanied and advocated alongside SAD communities. These fragments are not treated as representative evidence or exhaustive accounts, but as situated reflections, relational encounters, and interpretive anchors that help maintain analytical proximity to the everyday ecological experiences discussed throughout the article.

Ethical considerations guided both the engagement process and the use of field materials in this article. The authors do not position themselves as neutral observers or as representatives speaking on behalf of SAD women. As non-SAD researchers, the authors recognize that the knowledge produced through this article emerges within unequal relations of access, mobility, institutional position, and interpretation. All

identifying details were anonymized to protect community privacy and minimize potential harm, particularly given the vulnerable position of SAD communities within ongoing extractive development pressures. This process was also intended to avoid reproducing extractive research practices that treat Indigenous women's identities and experiences merely as data detached from the relational and political contexts in which they are lived. Consequently, conversational fragments and observations are used selectively and reflexively, not as extractive claims to authenticity, but as relational insights intended to illuminate the everyday experiences of SAD women while respecting the limits of representation (Behar, 1998; Haraway, 2018).

The analytical technique employed is thematic and interpretive reading, linking women's experiences, ecological care practices, and the language of development. The concept of banality is used to examine how violence against Indigenous women operates quietly through routine policy practices and development goals (Arendt, 2006). The concept of care is understood as an ethical and political practice that sustains life across generations (De La Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993), while feminist security perspectives are used to shift the meaning of security from state stability toward the sustainability of everyday life (Sjoberg, 2009).

Result and Discussion

The Banality of Indonesia Emas: When Violence Becomes Routine

Indonesia Emas 2045 is framed as a national horizon of prosperity, competitiveness, and transformation. Through the RPJPN 2025–2045 and RPJMN 2025–2029, the future is narrated through developmental vocabularies such as “human resource competitiveness,” “investment acceleration,” “*hilirisasi*” (downstreaming), “land optimization,” and “productive transformation” (Kementrian PPN, 2025). Within these policy frameworks, development goals are presented as neutral and inevitable processes that appear detached from conflict, unequal power relations, and ethical consequences. The language of development becomes administrative rather than political; forests become “resources,” mobility becomes “underdevelopment,” and Indigenous communities become populations to be integrated into national productivity. In this vision, progress is measured through indicators, growth trajectories, infrastructure expansion, and human capital metrics, while the everyday losses experienced by communities living at the margins of extraction rarely enter the grammar of policy itself.

The RPJMN repeatedly positions industrial downstreaming and spatial transformation as necessary pathways toward achieving sustainable growth and escaping the “middle-income trap” (Bappenas, 2025; Suyitno, 2023). Under this framework, the state promotes “*hilirisasi SDA unggulan*,” “*penguatan transformasi*,” “*optimalisasi sumber-sumber pertumbuhan ekonomi baru*,” and the acceleration of food self-sufficiency through “sustainable land optimization” (Bappenas, 2025; Kementrian PPN, 2025). These phrases appear technically rational and future-oriented. Yet beneath their bureaucratic neutrality lies a developmental logic that continuously reorganizes forests, bodies, and Indigenous lifeworlds according to the demands of accumulation and national productivity. Violence does not disappear within this framework; rather, it becomes absorbed into ordinary policy routines and institutional procedures that appear administratively necessary.

It is within this context that Arendt's (2006) notion of the “banality of evil” becomes analytically useful. This article does not invoke Arendt to equate contemporary development governance with the historical specificity of Nazi violence. Rather, the concept of banality is mobilized selectively to examine how violence may become normalized through routine bureaucratic practices, technical language, and administrative procedures that distance policy processes from ethical reflection regarding their consequences. The relevance of banality in this context lies not in historical equivalence, but in understanding how structural harm can be reproduced through ordinary institutional actions carried out in the name of progress, modernization, and national development.

In the context of *Indonesia Emas*, violence often operates not through overt coercion alone, but through developmental rationalities that render dispossession administratively acceptable. Forest conversion becomes “economic transformation,” displacement becomes “adequate housing provision,” and the restructuring of Indigenous livelihoods becomes “community empowerment.” Bureaucratic language softens rupture. The destruction of ecological relations is translated into indicators of productivity, spatial efficiency, and modernization. As Ferguson (1994) argues, development discourse frequently functions as an anti-politics machine, transforming deeply political questions of inequality, land, and power into technical matters of administration. Similarly, Gupta (2012) demonstrates how bureaucratic systems create distance between policy implementation and the lived realities of those most affected by them. In this process,

violence becomes difficult to recognize precisely because it appears through ordinary institutional routines rather than spectacular acts of force.

One of the clearest manifestations of this banality can be seen in the state's housing programs for SAD communities. Across several regencies in Jambi, including Sarolangun Regency and Batanghari Regency, the state has developed settlement programs under categories such as *Rumah Tinggal Layak Huni* (RTLH), *Rumah Khusus (Rusus)*, and programs for "isolated Indigenous community empowerment" (KAT) (Alinea, 2023; Bappenas, 2025). These projects are publicly framed as efforts to "humanize" and modernize SAD communities by transitioning them away from forest mobility and toward permanent settlement. Administratively, the programs appear successful: houses are built, infrastructure is counted, and development targets are fulfilled.

Nevertheless, the apparent success of those programs conceals another reality. Many settlements are spatially disconnected from forests, rivers, food sources, and medicinal plants that sustain SAD everyday life (Saturi, 2018). Women, who are often responsible for food gathering, caregiving, and maintaining ecological continuity, experience this displacement most intensely. In one reflection, a local advocate described the settlements as forms of "caging," because houses were built without sufficient access to livelihood land or ecological support systems (Saturi, 2018). The violence here is not spectacular. It unfolds quietly through planning documents, housing categories, and administrative targets that reduce well-being into measurable infrastructure provision while ignoring the ecological conditions necessary for sustaining life.

The incompatibility between state settlement schemes and SAD relational life becomes especially visible through the practice of *melangun*, a cultural obligation requiring families to move into the forest following death and mourning periods. Because state housing schemes are built upon assumptions of sedentary permanence, mobility is interpreted as abandonment rather than cultural continuity. Consequently, many settlements gradually deteriorate into what local reports describe as "ghost towns," with empty structures overtaken by weeds and decay (RiauPagi, 2022; Saturi, 2018). Development here produces a paradoxical landscape: houses intended to symbolize civilization stand abandoned, while communities return to precarious life within shrinking forests and plantation margins. Banality operates precisely through this disconnect between administrative success and lived ecological insecurity.

Another institutional practice demonstrating this bureaucratic normalization is the electronic national identity card (e-KTP) registration system. Under Indonesia's population administration framework, citizens must possess a fixed and formally recognized residential address to obtain legal identity documents and access state services (Agusmi Putra & Amir, 2022). For SAD communities living within or around forest territories, this requirement produces a structural contradiction. Because their living spaces often exist within conservation areas where formal village administration does not legally exist, many families cannot obtain registered addresses. Without e-KTP registration, they become administratively invisible, unable to access healthcare, education assistance, or social protection programs (Agusmi Putra & Amir, 2022, 2022; Tanjung, 2019)

This exclusion is intensified for women. During mobile registration programs, biometric procedures requiring facial photographs and retinal scans frequently conflict with SAD customary norms prohibiting women and adolescent girls from being photographed by outsiders (Tanjung, 2019). As a result, women are often excluded from enrollment processes and remain disconnected from reproductive healthcare and maternal social assistance. The bureaucratic machinery continues to function efficiently, yet its procedures silently produce exclusion because the system recognizes only fixed, legible, and administratively standardized forms of life. In this sense, banality emerges not through explicit hostility, but through the ordinary operation of administrative systems unable or unwilling to accommodate Indigenous relational realities.

Moreover, a field encounter further illustrates how these administrative boundaries produce everyday forms of exclusion. During field interactions, one of the researchers encountered an SAD man whose leg had become severely swollen, yet he could not receive treatment at the nearest healthcare facility because his national identity card (KTP) and BPJS (Indonesia's national health insurance system) registration were administratively tied to another health service region located much farther away. In practice, bureaucratic territorial divisions became more decisive than urgent bodily need, leaving care inaccessible despite visible suffering (Field Notes, 2024). This fragmentation of administrative recognition demonstrates how state systems often fail to accommodate the mobile, relational, and precarious realities of SAD communities. To further illustrate how banality operates through contemporary development governance, the relationship

between Indonesia Emas policy language, institutional practices, and everyday ecological consequences experienced by SAD women can be mapped as follows:

Table 1 Administrative Banality and SAD Women’s Ecological Insecurity

Indonesia Emas Policy Language	Institutional Practice	Everyday Ecological Consequence
“Adequate housing provision,” “community empowerment,” and “modernization”	RSSS/ <i>Rusus</i> settlement programs and KAT housing schemes	Ecological displacement, shrinking access to food sources, disrupted care relations, forced dependency
“Population administration,” “data integration,” and “inclusive service delivery”	e-KTP fixed-address registration and biometric enrolment systems	Administrative invisibility, exclusion from healthcare, education, and social protection services
“Human resource competitiveness,” “productive citizens,” and “human capital development”	Human capital indicators, modernization programs, productivity-based development metrics	Marginalization of Indigenous ecological knowledge, invisibilization of women’s care practices
“Land optimization,” “food self-sufficiency,” and “spatial transformation”	Plantation expansion, agrarian restructuring, and forest conversion	Forest loss, mobility restriction, erosion of subsistence and relational lifeworlds

The violence embedded within these developmental processes is therefore also epistemic. *Indonesia Emas* repeatedly frames progress through the language of “productive human resources,” competitiveness, modernization, and measurable human capital indicators (Bappenas, 2025). Within this framework, knowledge becomes valuable primarily when it contributes to productivity, industrial transformation, or market integration. Knowledge held by SAD women regarding medicinal plants, forest mobility, collective food practices, ecological restraint, and relational care rarely enters state categories of productivity or human capital. Their practices of sustaining life remain politically invisible because they do not conform to dominant developmental metrics.

What disappears within *Indonesia Emas* is therefore not only forest territory, but entire ways of relating to life. The banality of development lies precisely in its capacity to

normalize rupture while appearing ethical, rational, and progressive. Violence becomes embedded within ordinary planning categories, administrative routines, and policy ambitions that continue to speak the language of prosperity even as ecological worlds are gradually dismantled. For SAD women, the consequences are lived not abstractly, but through longer journeys for food, shrinking medicinal access, administrative invisibility, and the slow erosion of relationships that once sustained collective continuity.

Body, Food, and Forest: The Ecological Care of SAD Women

"Rimbo nia halom awak, putih halom mati awak" (the forest is our nature, if the forest disappears we all die), a phrase expressed by an SAD woman in an online reflective account published through Kompasiana (2021) affirms the entanglement of the forest with their bodies and embodied experiences. The bodies of SAD women are not merely biological entities that experience illness, fatigue, or menstruation. They are sites of knowledge, ecological archives, and terrains of care work that sustain the continuity of SAD community life. In a context where forests continue to shrink, state zoning hardens, and extractive development penetrates even to the limits of the body, the care practiced by SAD women becomes a form of life work that is never neutral. Their care work materializes as everyday practices imbued with ecological, social, and political meaning.

Ethnographic literature on the *Orang Rimba* demonstrates that women's relationships with food and forest are material and layered. In studies of kinship and gender among the *Orang Rimba*, Sager (2008) emphasizes that women hold key roles in food distribution, forest access, and the management of everyday resources. Without the jargon of "leadership," this authority quietly shapes the rhythms of SAD community life. Thus, food is never understood merely as a forest product, but as a medium of relationality. Certain fruits, such as *"buah labu ke tanah"* (fruit that falls to the ground), are often collected and passed on to women, binding ecological memory to women's life trajectories (Ginting et al., 2025; Sager, 2008; Shiva, 1993).

It is therefore impossible to understand this ecological care without recognizing its deep entanglement with the body. Women's bodies, in this context, become sites where knowledge of the forest is tested, stored, and transmitted (Agarwal, 2010; Elmhirst, 2015). Media accounts of menstruation among SAD women provide concrete illustrations of how reproductive health care is practiced through forest resources: tree bark is used as sanitary material, rivers function as spaces for cleansing, and certain plants such as

turmeric or sour fruits are consumed to maintain bodily balance (Kompasiana, 2021). Menstruation, in this context, is not a hidden private issue, but an ecological care practice that links women's bodies to the sustainability of the forest.

Furthermore, menstruation and postpartum periods are understood as bodily phases requiring specific forms of care. During these times, SAD women are often “set apart” from other family members and provided with separate huts located near their dwellings. This separation is not a form of stigma, but rather a mechanism of protection and recovery, in which only other women are permitted to visit and interact with them, including assisting with infant care during breastfeeding. A SAD elder recounted that a number of forest medicinal plants are traditionally used to support women's recovery during menstruation and postpartum periods. Although the names of these plants cannot always be clearly articulated due to communication limitations, their usage remains precise and alive. This knowledge demonstrates that SAD women's reproductive health is practiced as embodied knowledge, transmitted through experience and collective care, and deeply rooted in the relationships between body, forest, and women's solidarity (Field Notes, 2024).



Figure 1. A tarpaulin-roofed hut like this is often used as a space for women to “withdraw” during menstruation and postpartum periods. Some SAD community members, including Induk F, who refused government-provided housing, also choose to live in tarpaulin-roofed homes like this (Field Notes, 2024).

However, this care work does not take place within a safe space. When forests are transformed for instance into industrial timber plantations, oil palm estates, or conservation zones with strict boundaries—the ecological care work of SAD women

comes into direct confrontation with structural violence. Ginting et al. (2025) demonstrate how SAD food insecurity increases alongside forest degradation, zoning, and relocation. The loss of specific food sources and medicinal plants is not merely a loss of nutrition, but also a loss of ecological memory. Women are often those most deeply affected by this loss, as they are the custodians of knowledge about what once existed and what can no longer be found. Importantly, this relational proximity to forests should not be understood as an essential or inherently feminine connection to nature. Rather, it emerges from historically situated experiences of care work, subsistence responsibilities, mobility, and the unequal burdens women carry amid ongoing ecological dispossession. Field notes reveal how such loss materializes as embodied experience. An elderly *Induk* in Lantak Seribu Village expressed that she did not know where to seek treatment when ill, as access to health insurance had never truly reached her community. “*Sayo pun dak tau lah, kalo sakit nak berobat ke mantri mano*” (I do not know where to go for medical treatment), she said softly. This unknowing was not ignorance, but the result of the absence of accessible state care systems for SAD women, while forest-based care continues to erode (Field Notes, 2024).

In such conditions, the ecological care of SAD women operates between two absences: the loss of forest and the absence of the state. This void is often filled by women’s bodies themselves, manifested through the labor of caring for children, partners, elders, and the community. Azzahra et al. (2017) note that oil palm expansion transforms women’s care work into layered wage labor, increasing their double burden without reducing domestic responsibilities. Field observations and conversations conducted between November 2023 and February 2024 further revealed that SAD women who are compelled to collect loose oil palm fruits (*brondolan*) in plantations face risks of injury, infection, and denial of healthcare services as experienced by a SAD man whose leg swelled due to palm thorns but was refused treatment at a public health center due to payment issues, a reality that also impacts the women who care for him at home (Field Notes, 2024).

Care in this framework is not an apolitical activity (De La Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). Critical feminism reminds us that care work is often silenced because it is considered “natural” for women. In the SAD context, this silencing is further exacerbated by development discourse that ignores care as labor. Policy studies on women’s participation in social forestry show that although women are legally recognized as policy

subjects, their care work is never counted as substantive participation (Boang Manalu et al., 2022). Ecological care is reduced to compliance with regulations such as planting, maintaining, or following programs without recognition of the knowledge and burdens borne by women.

Fragments of conversation and field notes reveal that care work is also a site of women's agency. *Induk B*, for example, determined the types and locations of fruit seedlings planted by a facilitating team. Her husband casually remarked, "*nurut orang rumah itu saja lah*" (just follow what she says), signaling recognition of women's authority in matters of food and household land. This decision may appear small, but it is precisely where ecological care operates: choosing plants means planning the family's food future and anchoring hope in the remaining land (Field Notes, 2024). Furthermore, the agency of SAD women is also illustrated in how they respond to failed state interventions. When government-provided housing under the *Rumah Sangat Sederhana Sekali* (RSSS) program is built on village peripheries far from food sources and forests, women are often the first to experience the inadequacy of such spaces. *Induk F*, an elderly woman, chose to leave the provided housing because "*dak do kami nak cari makan*" (there is no way for us to find food there). This decision is not an irrational rejection of modernity, but an ecological judgment rooted in embodied experience and care: a house without access to food is a house that cannot sustain life.

Thus, the everyday ecological care of SAD women is also deeply connected to security. Not security in the state-centric sense measured through territorial stability or administrative order, but security as the capacity to sustain life and maintain relationships (Sjoberg, 2009). For SAD women, safety is the condition in which they can continue to gather food, care for children, maintain ecological balance, and access to a forest that remains alive. In this sense, insecurity does not only emerge solely through direct violence, but also through the gradual erosion of forests, subsistence relations, mobility, and the ecological conditions that sustain collective life. This understanding expands feminist approaches to security by shifting attention away from security as institutional protection alone toward security as relational continuity. While dominant security frameworks often focus on armed conflict, territorial stability, or formal peace processes, the experiences of SAD women demonstrate that violence may also unfold through ecological dispossession, shrinking food access, disrupted care relations, and the slow destruction of life-sustaining environments. Their practices of ecological care,

therefore, reposition forests, subsistence, and relational survival as central dimensions of peace and security.

Within this context, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework becomes relevant not because SAD women fit neatly into formal peacebuilding categories, but because their experiences reveal broader meanings of protection and prevention. This aligns particularly with two pillars of the WPS agenda, protection and prevention, which emphasize safeguarding women from violence while addressing the structural roots of insecurity and injustice (De Jonge Oudraat & Brown, 2025). However, within the experiences of SAD women, protection extends beyond legal or institutional safeguarding to include the protection of forests, water sources, food systems, and ecological relationships that sustain life itself. Prevention similarly moves beyond conflict prevention alone, encompassing the prevention of ecological destruction, dispossession, and the erosion of collective relational worlds.

A striking example of how meanings of security differ between the state and SAD communities is the practice of *melangun*, or mobility and withdrawal from external institutions, which is often interpreted as noncompliance. In SAD custom, *melangun* refers to the collective movement of a group following misfortune, including death. In contrast to state perspectives, critical feminist approaches understand this practice as a security strategy that protects bodies and relationships from greater forms of violence (Najib, 2020; Sager, 2017). Women play a central role in this strategy, as they are the ones who assess risks for children and families. Moreover, media narratives concerning oil palm encroachment and plantation expansion in Jambi illustrate how SAD women are among those most affected by spatial transformations and increasingly exposed to everyday forms of insecurity, including harassment, fear, and constant vigilance within public and plantation spaces (Maulida, 2025). This violence rarely erupts as a singular dramatic event; rather, it persists as a sustained sense of insecurity embedded within women's bodies. Consequently, ecological care in such conditions becomes a form of survival labor: ensuring children return home safely, securing clean water, and adjusting food practices to increasingly limited resources.

A critical–interpretive feminist approach allows us to read this care not as a romanticization of women's resilience, but as an indicator of structural inequality. SAD women are not “naturally” closer to nature; this proximity is shaped by social positioning, divisions of labor, and the absence of equitable care alternatives (Gupta, 2012). Through

a reflexive ethnographic sensibility, field fragments such as the silence of *Induk A* sitting outside a dialogue forum, choosing to listen rather than speak, become crucial data. She is the guardian of her husband's dignity and safety, a witness to agreements that may affect their family's life. Leadership here operates through quiet presence, not speeches or signatures.

Thus, body, food, and forest constitute three inseparable axes for understanding the ecological care of SAD women. This care sustains community life, yet is continuously pressured by extractive development logics and gender-insensitive policies that are politely concealed beneath the noble mission of *Indonesia Emas*. Reading care work as life work opens space to understand that violence against SAD women often occurs through the erasure of care itself: when forests disappear, when food can no longer be gathered, and when women's bodies are forced to bear unrecognized burdens.

Non-Performative Leadership of Indigenous Women

Leadership is often imagined as the loudest voice, the figure occupying the front seat, or the individual who visibly represents a group or community. Within this framework, leadership demands performance through visibility, speech, and formal recognition. Yet, in the lives of SAD women, leadership operates in the opposite direction: in silence. Their leadership does not seek recognition on the stage of power, but is rooted in everyday care work and the responsibility of sustaining life. The notion of non-performative leadership proposed in this article refers to forms of leadership that do not depend upon visibility, formal authority, or public political performance in order to shape collective life. While related to concepts such as informal authority, everyday resistance, relational leadership, and feminist care politics, non-performative leadership differs in that it operates through repetitive acts of care, ecological judgment, relational maintenance, and the prevention of social rupture often from positions rendered politically invisible within developmental and patriarchal structures. Informal authority still presumes recognizable influence, while everyday resistance emphasizes subtle acts against domination (Scott, 1998). By contrast, non-performative leadership may not even appear as "leadership" within dominant political frameworks because it emerges through the ordinary labor of sustaining relationships, ecological continuity, and collective survival (Tronto, 1993).

The leadership of SAD women operates within spaces that are never recorded as political arenas. *Induk A*, the wife of a *Tumenggung*, attended an official dialogue forum

with the subdistrict government in Merangin. However, she did not sit among the participants. Instead, she chose to sit at the edge of the room, near an open door, while holding her child. When invited to come inside, she gently declined, saying, “*Dak lah, siko bae, dengar jugo. Sayo nak tau bae apo cakap orang tu*” (It’s okay here, I can still listen. I just want to know what they are saying). She chose to listen, observe, and remember (Field Notes, 2024). The experience of *Induk A* offers a powerful illustration. From the perspective of formal participation, her presence appears insignificant. She does not speak, is not recorded, does not “contribute” within the forum itself. Yet her decision to remain nearby while listening carefully may be read as a form of attentiveness toward conversations and decisions that could affect the safety and continuity of family and community life. Rather than occupying the center of political visibility, her presence reflects a quieter mode of engagement one rooted in witnessing, relational responsibility, and careful observation.

At the same time, acknowledging these forms of leadership must not obscure or romanticize the structural exclusion of women from formal arenas of authority and decision-making. Silence is not always freely chosen, and invisibility may function both as a strategy of survival and as an effect of structural marginalization. SAD women’s leadership practices emerge within unequal political conditions in which access to representation, institutional recognition, and decision-making power often remains limited. Thus, the concept of non-performative leadership is not intended to naturalize women’s marginalization from public authority, but rather to illuminate forms of political agency that continue to sustain collective life despite conditions of exclusion.

Furthermore, as explained by Sager (2017), within *Orang Rimba* Indigenous communities, kinship and customary relations cannot be understood through the public–private divide typical of modern state paradigms. Women play a crucial role in maintaining social and ecological balance, even though this role is rarely recognized as leadership. The leadership of SAD women is also evident in everyday decision-making that is often dismissed as trivial. *Induk B*, for instance, determines the types of plant seedlings to be cultivated around their living area. When asked, her husband simply smiles and says, “*nurut orang rumah itu saja*” (just follow what she says). This decision is not merely a domestic matter. Choosing plants means determining the family’s food future, assessing soil compatibility, and anticipating possibilities for survival in increasingly constrained spaces. *Induk B*’s leadership operates through ecological

knowledge and long-term responsibility, rather than through explicit instruction (Field Notes, 2024).

In internal conflicts between SAD groups, women's leadership becomes even more visible. *Ibu H*, a woman who has long worked as a facilitator with SAD communities, recounts that when disputes arise, final decisions often rest in the hands of the *Induk*. They determine forms of compensation—cloth, money, livestock, or gold—through negotiations that are never formalized as court proceedings. These decisions are accepted and respected because they emerge from moral authority and collective trust. Leadership here is not based on written law, but on the capacity to maintain relationships so that conflict does not disrupt communal life (Field Notes, 2024). These experiences resonate with the notion of *everyday resistance* discussed by (Kasmiati & Oktaviana, 2022) which shows that women often resist not through large-scale actions or open confrontation, but through small, repetitive, and concealed practices in the form of organizing, maneuvering, and caring for their living spaces. Such resistance is not always aimed at overturning structures, but at preventing the collapse of everyday life.

It is here that the work of Srilatha Batliwala becomes particularly relevant for deepening the analysis of SAD women's realities. Batliwala distinguishes between different forms of power: *power over*, *power to*, *power with*, and *power within* (Batliwala, 2007). In many development programs, women may be included, but only at a symbolic level. They are present without having the capacity to shape decision-making processes, a condition Batliwala describes as non-transformative participation. This situation is also experienced by SAD women: they bear the primary burden of sustaining life, yet their leadership is not recognized as legitimate. However, reading SAD women's experiences solely through the lens of non-transformative participation is insufficient. SAD women are not primarily pursuing structural transformation as envisioned by the state. Rather, they are pursuing something more fundamental: the continuity of life. In this context, *power within*—consciousness, dignity, and knowledge that emerge from lived experience becomes the primary source of strength. Their leadership does not necessarily aim to seize structures, but often emerges through efforts to ensure that existing structures do not entirely erode the conditions necessary for sustaining life.

Rather than understanding care solely as moral virtue or women's natural responsibility, this article approaches care as labor shaped by unequal political and ecological conditions. The repetitive work of feeding children, mediating conflict,

maintaining access to food, or protecting relationships often emerges precisely because state infrastructures of care remain inaccessible, exclusionary, or inadequate for SAD communities. In this sense, the everyday leadership practiced by SAD women reflects both agency and constraint: it sustains collective survival while simultaneously revealing the unequal burdens placed upon women within conditions of dispossession.

Furthermore, when care is excluded from the realm of politics, politics loses its ethical foundation (Tronto, 1993). The leadership of SAD women demonstrates how care work becomes the basis of local political ethics. Women lead by ensuring that children are fed, the sick is cared for, conflicts are mediated, and the forest is maintained so that it does not 'become angry,' a recurring expression in field conversations used to describe ecological imbalance and the consequences of disrupting forest relations (Field Notes, 2024). This leadership is not grounded in control, but in responsibility toward relationships.

Subsequently, *Induk C's* refusal to reside in government-provided RSSS housing sharply illustrates this dimension. She chose to live under a tarpaulin on land owned by local oil palm farmers because the provided housing severed access to food and forest. This decision is often interpreted as an inability to adapt. However, from the perspective of non-performative leadership, *Induk C's* decision may be understood as a form of ecological judgment shaped by embodied experiences of food access, forest proximity, and survival, even though it is never articulated as a formal or "public" political decision (Field Notes, 2024). A similar pattern appears in other strands of critical feminist discourse that capture women's agency within ecological crises, emphasizing that subaltern women often remain invisible because they do not conform to dominant languages and categories of knowledge (Hendrastiti & Setiahari, 2022). Through postcolonial feminist and feminist political ecology approaches, women's agency becomes visible precisely in everyday practices of caring for environments and sustaining life. SAD women, like fisherwomen or farmers in these studies, possess strategic ecological knowledge that is not recognized as a basis for leadership because it is not translated into policy language.

The leadership practices discussed in this section, therefore, should not be understood as alternatives that replace the importance of women's participation within formal decision-making spaces. Rather, they reveal how political agency continues to operate even under conditions where recognition, representation, and institutional

authority remain unevenly distributed. It becomes clear that the non-performative leadership of SAD women can be understood as a living practice of decolonial feminism. It rejects the universalism of Western-masculinist models of leadership and offers an alternative understanding of power: the capacity to sustain life amid the banality of developmental violence. This leadership is quiet, unspectacular, difficult to celebrate, and often escapes recognition. Yet it is precisely through silence, persistence, and repetitive care work that SAD women ensure that life is not entirely consumed by extractive logics. In this form of leadership that does not seek visibility, we encounter the most fundamental form of politics: the politics of survival.

The Perspective of Suku Anak Dalam Women towards Peace and Security

The practices of care carried out by SAD women led to a sense of safety amid the clamor of ecological destruction. For them, peace and security are lived as life work continuously enacted through the body, relationships, and attentiveness to what is fragile. These practices are sustained by women who daily weigh risks, manage grief, and ensure that life does not collapse. In a fragment of conversation with SAD women, they never speak of “security” as a final condition. What they speak of is sufficiency: sufficient food, sufficient distance from conflict, sufficient calm to raise children. When *Induk C* says, “*dak do pun orang tu nak bantu kito*” (no one from the government is willing to help us) (Field Notes, 2024), she is not articulating a policy protest. Various forms of “assistance” have, of course, been provided by the state, although they are often not aligned with SAD customary contexts. What *Induk C* expresses is a form of security knowledge that relying on external promises instead produces vulnerability. Security, therefore, is not something given, but something enacted every day.

This narrative resonates with feminist understandings of peace, which is not always expressed through spectacular reconciliation, but often through decisions not to prolong conflict, to remain silent at certain moments, or to withdraw before tensions escalate (Robbins, 2011; Sjoberg, 2009). In the past, when their forests were still intact, peace may have been understood as a tranquil life supported by abundant food sources and ecological balance. However, in the present lives of SAD women where forests have been cleared peace becomes a skill of situational reading: knowing when to speak and when to withhold. The practice of *melangun*, for instance, sharply illustrates this ethic of peace. While often understood as a ritual of mourning, for SAD women it is also a care-

based security strategy. By moving away, they allow the body to recover and social relations to regenerate. *Melangun* prevents grief from turning into anger, and anger into conflict. It is a practice of distancing that aims to restore balance to life. For example, SAD groups refrain from extracting livelihood resources from areas surrounding sites of mourning. As a result, tubers, medicinal plants, rattan, river fish, resin, bees, wild boar, and other sources of livelihood are able to regenerate and remain sustainable.



Figure 2. An SAD child grating forest tubers that are becoming increasingly rare. According to SAD women, these tubers cannot be cultivated and only grow naturally in healthy forest ecosystems (Field Notes, 2024).

Within this practice, women hold a central role. When men travel to unfamiliar areas to search for food, women ensure that children remain safe, nourished, and protected from harm. Attitudes that are often perceived as “strict” or “unfriendly” in fact emerge from this responsibility for security (Field Notes, 2024). Women do not maintain peace through rhetoric, but through constant vigilance. Furthermore, the ethics of peace among SAD women also operate through customary prohibitions attached to women’s bodies. The prohibition against touching SAD women is often interpreted as restriction; however, within contexts of unequal power relations and threats of violence, this prohibition functions as a mechanism of relational protection. It creates safe distance, marks boundaries of interaction, and prevents violations before they occur. Peace, in this

sense, is maintained through the regulation of relationships, rather than through the enforcement of law.

This reading is sharpened by the concept of *care and everyday peace*, which shows that peace is often built through care practices that are considered apolitical such as caring for children, tending to the sick, and ensuring that daily life continues yet it is



Figure 3. The condition of a SAD settlement in a village in Merangin Regency, originally established by the government. Many of the wooden structures are now damaged. The settlement is located on the edge of the village, near a public cemetery (Field Notes, 2024).

precisely here that the foundations of peace are established (Vaittinen et al., 2021). Care is not merely a response to crisis, but a form of conflict prevention that operates before violence takes its most visible form. In the lives of SAD women, care work functions as an architecture of security.

To care is to ensure that food is available, health is maintained, and social relations do not fracture. When the state fails to provide basic services as expressed by an elderly *Induk* (Induk D), who does not even know where to seek medical treatment, care work becomes the only remaining form of security. Security is not measured by the presence of institutions, but by the family's ability to survive today.

This care work unfolds amid forms of insecurity that are often slow, ordinary, and deeply embedded within everyday life: relocation that severs access to food, housing assistance located far from sources of livelihood, and healthcare systems that remain inaccessible for many SAD communities. Rather than appearing as spectacular violence, these conditions accumulate gradually through disruptions to subsistence, mobility, and ecological continuity. In such circumstances, SAD women navigate insecurity not primarily through confrontation, but through small decisions grounded in everyday survival and relational responsibility. *Induk F's* decision to leave RSSS housing and live under a tarpaulin on oil palm land illustrates this clearly. A house that is considered "adequate" administratively is not necessarily safe in lived experience. Her decision

reflects embodied knowledge about food access, forest proximity, and the practical conditions necessary for sustaining life. In this context, care work becomes a continuous practice of evaluating, remembering, and anticipating how life can continue amid ecological and social uncertainty. Its political force lies not in dramatic resistance, but in its persistent refusal of arrangements that undermine the conditions necessary for collective survival.

A feminist reading of security further reinforces this point: security constructed through masculinist logics (control, protection, and domination) often fails to capture women's experiences, which are shaped by everyday threats such as hunger, illness, and the loss of relationships (Sjoberg, 2009). In the lives of SAD women, security is inseparable from everyday life, it is lived as the capacity to sustain life amid ecological and social uncertainty. However, these practices of peace should not be treated as universal models. They emerge from highly specific contexts: shrinking forests, a partially present state, and continuously negotiated customary relations. It is therefore crucial to avoid universalism, as emphasized by Jaya (2025), who argues that Indigenous women's rituals and spiritualities must be understood contextually as practices of ecological care and value preservation, rather than as generalized cultural symbols. In the SAD context, small and everyday rituals become means of maintaining peace with both nature and others.

In a global context, this dimension resonates with Suwardi (2023) who discusses cross-cultural women's movements in building sustainable peace, showing that women often construct peace through relational practices such as connecting communities, tending to social wounds, and sustaining dialogue in everyday life. Peace does not always emerge from negotiation tables, but from quiet labor that maintains trust. These practices are embodied in care work, *melangun*, and customary prohibitions. Thus, within global dialogues on women, peace, and security, the practices of SAD women resonate, but never fully align with formal policy frameworks. SAD women do not speak in the language of resolution, do not claim themselves as peace agents, and do not demand institutional recognition. Yet these experiences also reveal how practices of peace and security continue to be sustained even in contexts where institutional recognition and formal support remain limited. Their care practices demonstrate that peace and security are often maintained through everyday relational labor rather than through formalized programs alone.

At the same time, not every act of survival or care should automatically be interpreted as a peace practice. Survival, adaptation, and social reproduction may occur under deeply violent conditions without necessarily transforming those conditions themselves. In this article, peace refers more specifically to practices that sustain relational continuity, prevent social rupture, reduce the escalation of conflict, and preserve the conditions necessary for collective life to continue. Thus, care becomes a peace practice not simply because it sustains life, but because it actively works to maintain coexistence amid ecological precarity, social tension, and structural abandonment. To clarify this distinction, the following table summarizes how peace is understood in relation to other everyday life-sustaining practices among SAD women.

Table 2 Relational Peace in the Everyday Lives of SAD Women

Concept	Primary Orientation	Illustration in SAD Women's Lives
Survival	Enduring immediate hardship and uncertainty	Securing food amid shrinking forests and limited state support
Adaptation	Adjusting everyday practices to changing ecological and social conditions	Relocating living spaces or livelihood practices after forest loss
Care	Sustaining bodies, relationships, and everyday continuity	Caring for children, elders, and sick family members
Social Reproduction	Maintaining collective continuity across generations	Transmitting ecological knowledge, food practices, and customary relations
Peace	Preventing rupture and sustaining relational coexistence amid precarity	<i>Melangun</i> , conflict avoidance, ecological balance, and maintaining conditions for collective life

By positioning peace and security as life work, SAD women shift the center of analysis from the state to relationships, from policy to care, and from stability to continuity. Within the experiences of SAD women, peace is understood less as the complete absence of violence than as the ongoing capacity to sustain relationships and continue life without paralyzing fear. Security is not assessed by the presence of authorities, but by the ability of families to eat, care for the sick, and avoid harm. Thus, through the perspective of SAD women, peace and security are sustained through small

yet courageous decisions enacted day by day, body by body—when to move, when to remain silent, when to refuse, and when to endure.

Conclusion

This article positions SAD women as a compass for understanding how the power of development operates today. From bodies that menstruate and undergo postpartum recovery, from food gathered slowly, from forests read through memory, to silence chosen as strategy, SAD women demonstrate how life is sustained amid processes that systematically erode it. It is at this point that the concept of the banality of *Indonesia Emas* finds its most tangible meaning. In this study, *Indonesia Emas* is not read as a neutral vision of the future, but as a mechanism of normalization where the language of optimism renders erasure as natural, relational disconnection as necessary, and ecological violence as administrative. By centering SAD women, this article shows that the banality of *Indonesia Emas* does not operate at the margins but penetrates the core of life itself. When ecological care is treated as a domestic matter, when women's leadership is not recognized as leadership, and when everyday peace is interpreted as noncompliance, development proceeds without accountability for its impact on ongoing life. Here, SAD women become an ethical boundary marker: to what extent can progress be justified if the life that is sustained daily continues to be displaced?

The findings of this article demonstrate that care is not merely a response to vulnerability, but a political practice that sustains community continuity. The leadership of SAD women operates without a stage, yet determines the direction of life; peace is lived as the management of tension, not as stability; and security is understood as the capacity to sustain life, not as the presence of institutions. All of this unfolds within spaces that are not spectacular, spaces that, in fact, become the primary targets of the banality of *Indonesia Emas*. Thus, this article calls for a shift in how development narratives are read. SAD women reveal that the failure of development does not always appear as open conflict, but as the gradual erosion of the labor of sustaining life. If development continues to be understood through indicators that erase care, then we lose not only forests and food but also the capacity to recognize violence when it appears in orderly forms. Conceptually, this article contributes in three important ways. First, it proposes the notion of the banality of *Indonesia Emas* to explain how developmental violence becomes normalized through administrative optimism, ecological dispossession, and the erasure

of care labor. Second, the article introduces the concept of non-performative leadership to illuminate forms of Indigenous women's leadership that operate beyond visibility, formal authority, and institutional recognition. Third, the article expands feminist understandings of peace and security by showing how ecological care, relational continuity, and everyday practices of sustaining life function as forms of peace work within contexts of ongoing dispossession and structural precarity. While this article offers these contributions, its empirical scope is limited to the Indigenous SAD community. Future studies may broaden the discussion by including other Indigenous and traditionally forest-nomadic communities situated within different developmental and governance contexts. Comparative research could provide further insight into Indigenous care, gendered leadership, and the paradoxes of development.

The banality of *Indonesia Emas* demands a critique that is both ethical and epistemic: the courage to acknowledge that life is often sustained through small forms of labor that are never accounted for. In the experiences of SAD women, it is precisely these forms of labor that keep the world intact, even as they are never recognized as contributions. By positioning SAD women as subjects of knowledge, this article invites readers to pause easy optimism and to listen to what is silent. It is in bodies and care practices considered ordinary that we find the earliest signs that something has gone wrong. Care, in this context, is not a passive stance. It is the most radical refusal of the banality of *Indonesia Emas*: a refusal to allow life to disappear without ever being named. It is therefore clear that this article proposes a fundamental shift, from a model of development that measures progress through growth and order, toward a framework that places the labor of sustaining life as its primary ethical measure. Within this shift, *Indonesia Emas* is no longer understood as a goal to be achieved at all costs, but as a narrative that must be questioned when it normalizes the erasure of bodies, forests, and relationships that sustain everyday life, as experienced by Indigenous SAD women in the remote regions of Jambi, Sumatra.

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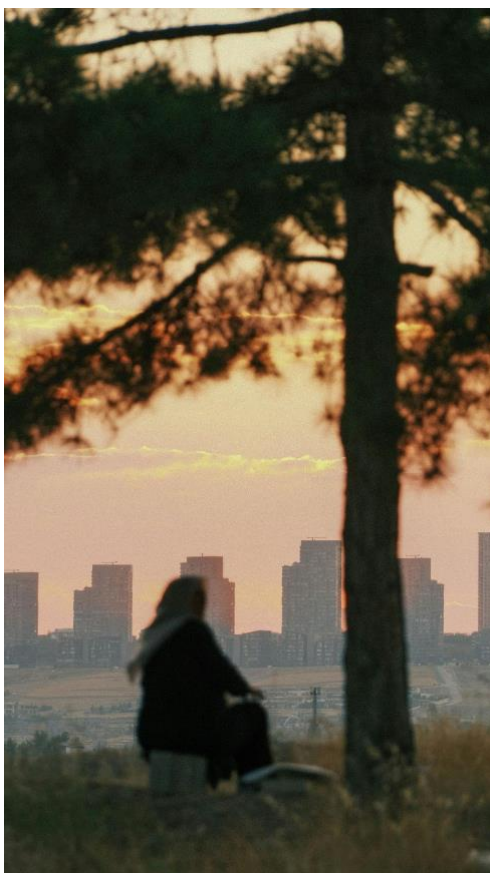
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Környezeti megküzdés és diszpozíciós súrlódás: Az expozió újraszabályozása a késő modern túlterheltség kontextusában | Environmental Coping and Dispositional Friction: Reconfiguring Exposure in Conditions of Late Modern Overload

Gyursánszky Ágnes



Caption: Person Sitting Beneath a Tree Overlooking the City at Sunset. Photograph by Ahmet Çiftçi, from *A Person Sitting on a Bench Looking at the City* (Pexels Photo ID 28157231), 2024, Pexels (<https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-person-sitting-on-a-bench-looking-at-the-city-28157231/>).

Magyar absztrakt

A tanulmány azt vizsgálja, miként alakulnak át a cselekvés formái a késő modern társadalmak túlterheltséggel, ingerbőséggel és mediált kapcsolatokkal jellemezhető környezetében. A kvalitatív esettanulmány egy narratív életútinterjún keresztül elemzi, ahogyan az egyén reagál a fragmentált figyelem és a folyamatos jelenlétkényszer tapasztalatára. Az elemzés Bernard Lahire diszpozícióelméletére (Lahire, 2011) támaszkodva a feszültségeket diszpozíciós súrlódásként értelmezi, amely az érzéki közvetlenségre, kontrollra és kapcsolati közelségre irányuló beállítódások, valamint a gyorsulással, mediációval és ingerterheléssel jellemezhető társadalmi környezet közötti inkompatibilitásból fakad.

A tanulmány bevezeti a környezeti megküzdés fogalmát, amely olyan cselekvési logikát jelöl, amely nem az egyéni kapacitások növelésére, hanem az expozíció feltételeinek szelektív csökkentésére és újraszabályozására irányul. Az empirikus elemzés megmutatja, hogy ez a logika miként jelenik meg a mindennapi gyakorlatok átalakításában, a mediált kapcsolatok korlátozásában, valamint a materiális és társas környezet újraszervezésében.

Az eredmények arra utalnak, hogy a késő modern válságokra adott válaszok nem merülnek ki az alkalmazkodás és a reziliencia formáiban, hanem megjelenhetnek a részvétel feltételeinek tudatos korlátozásaként is, amely a mindennapi ellenállás egy sajátos formájaként is értelmezhető.

Kulcsszavak: késő modernitás; társadalmi gyorsulás; diszpozíciós súrlódás; környezeti megküzdés; szelektív kivonódás; narratív életútinterjú; mindennapi ellenállás

Angol absztrakt

This paper examines how forms of action are reconfigured in late modern societies characterized by overload, sensory excess, and mediated social relations. Based on a qualitative case study drawing on a narrative life-history interview, it explores how an individual responds to experiences of fragmented attention and continuous demands for presence. Drawing on Bernard Lahire's theory of dispositions (Lahire, 2011), the analysis interprets these tensions as forms of *dispositional friction*, emerging from the incompatibility between orientations toward sensory immediacy, control, and relational proximity, and a social environment structured by acceleration, mediation, and excess stimuli.

The paper introduces the concept of *environmental coping* to describe a mode of action that does not aim at increasing individual capacities, but rather at selectively reducing and reorganizing conditions of exposure. Empirically, this logic manifests in the transformation of everyday practices, the limitation of mediated interactions, and the reconfiguration of material and social environments.

The findings suggest that responses to late modern crises are not limited to resilience or adaptation but may take the form of selective withdrawal and the active redefinition of participation conditions, which can be understood as a form of everyday resistance.

Keywords: late modernity; social acceleration; dispositional friction; environmental coping; selective withdrawal; narrative life-history interview; everyday resistance

Bevezetés

A késő modern társadalmakban a mindennapi életet egyre inkább a gyorsulás, az ingerbőség és a folyamatos jelenlétkényszer strukturálja. Az időhiány, a fragmentált figyelem és a mediált kapcsolatok¹⁸ napjainkban már nem kivételes állapotként, hanem a társadalmi működés alapfeltételeiként jelennek meg (Rosa, 2013; Giddens, 1991). A cselekvés normatív horizontja e kontextusban egyre inkább az aktivitás, az alkalmazkodás és az önoptimalizálás irányába tolódik el. A strukturális feszültségek ebben a keretben például akkor válnak láthatóvá, amikor a folyamatos elérhetőség és az intenzív ingerterhelés társadalmi elvárásai inkompatibilissé válnak az érzéki közvetlenségre, a kontrollra és a megszakítatlan jelenlétre irányuló egyéni beállítódásokkal. Az ilyen feszültségekre adott egyéni válaszok domináns értelmezési kerete a késő modern, neoliberális kormányozhatóság kontextusában az empowerment és a reziliencia fogalmai köré szerveződik (Foucault, 2008; Cruikshank, 1999). Ezek a megközelítések a társadalmi bizonytalanságokat az egyéni megküzdés, az önfejlesztés és az affektív önszabályozás problémáivá alakítják (Cruikshank, 1999; Rose, 1999; Brown, 2015; Székely, 2015), amelynek következtében a strukturális feszültségek gyakran egyéni megküzdési feladatokká fordítódnak le. A hatalom működése ezzel párhuzamosan egyre inkább internalizált formát ölt: az egyének saját magukat kormányozzák azáltal, hogy a strukturális problémákat személyes feladatként értelmezik (Foucault, 2008; Han, 2015; Han, 2017).¹⁹

A tanulmány ebből a keretből kiindulva egy alternatív cselekvési logikát vizsgál és egy narratív életútinterjú elemzésén keresztül érvel amellett, hogy a túlterheltségre adott válasz nem minden esetben az alkalmazkodás vagy a kapacitásnövelés irányába mozdul el.²⁰ Az elemzett esetben a cselekvés nem a rendszerben való hatékonyabb részvételre, hanem a mindennapi életvilág feltételeinek újraszabályozására irányul.

Jelen munka központi fogalma a *környezeti megküzdés*, amely olyan cselekvési logikát jelöl, amely az egyéni alkalmazkodás helyett az expozíció feltételeinek szelektív

¹⁸ A mediált kapcsolatok fogalma a technológiai közvetítésen keresztül szerveződő interakciókra utal, lásd például Couldry és Hepp (2017) mediációelméleti megközelítéseit.

¹⁹ Lásd Han (2015) a teljesítménytársadalom kritikájáról és a „pszichopolitikai rezsím” kialakulásáról.

²⁰ A tanulmány a Vajda Júlia által vezetett, az NKFIH által támogatott „Demokratikus viselkedés és joghoz való viszony családtörténeti háttérben” című kutatás keretében készült (K143092).

korlátozására és újraszabályozására irányul. Expozíció alatt a tanulmány azt érti, hogy az egyén milyen mértékben van kitéve különböző társadalmi, technológiai, érzéki és kapcsolati hatásoknak, mint például a folyamatos elérhetőség, a gyors reagálás kényszere vagy a másokkal való állandó kapcsolódás elvárása.

A visszavonulás és a részvétel csökkentése ugyanakkor nem előzmények nélküli jelenség: a digitális detoxról, a downshiftingről, vagy éppen az önkéntes egyszerűségről szóló szakirodalom is rámutat arra, hogy a késő modern túlterheltségre gyakran jelennek meg lekapcsolódásra, egyszerűsítésre vagy lassításra irányuló életmódszerű válaszok (Sutton, 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020; Shaw & Newholm, 2002). A jelen tanulmány azonban a divatszerű, piacosított vagy önsegítő visszavonuládiskurzust vizsgálata helyett azt helyezi fókuszba, hogy a részvétel mértékének csökkentése miként válhat a diszpozíciók és a társadalmi környezet közötti sűrűlódásra adott sajátos megküzdési logikává. Az expozíció tehát mindazokat a helyzeteket jelöli, amelyek az egyén figyelmét, érzékelését, érzelmi terhelhetőségét és cselekvési lehetőségeit folyamatosan igénybe veszik. Az expozíció újraszabályozása pedig azt jelenti, hogy az egyén nem egyszerűen alkalmazkodni próbál a túlterhelő környezethez, hanem megváltoztatja, milyen hatásoknak, kapcsolatoknak és elvárásoknak teszi ki magát. Ez történhet a digitális kommunikáció korlátozásával, bizonyos társas helyzetek kerülésével, a mindennapi rutinok átalakításával vagy olyan környezet kialakításával, amely kevésbé terheli túl az érzékelést és a figyelmet. A visszavonulás a társadalmi részvétel feltételeinek aktív újraszervezéseként értelmezhető, nem kivonódásként.

Az elemzés célja annak bemutatása, hogy a késő modern társadalmakban a strukturális feszültségek nem csupán eltérő módon válnak megélhetővé, hanem eltérő cselekvési formákká fordítódnak le. Ezek a formák nem eredményezik szükségképpen azok politikai artikulációját, hanem a mindennapi életvilág gyakorlati újraszervezésében is testet ölthetnek. Ott, ahol az identitás, a krízis és a cselekvés közvetlenül összekapcsolódik egymással.

Elméleti keret: diszpozíciós súrlódás és a megküzdés átrendeződése a késő modernitásban

Késő modernitás és túlterheltség

A késő modern társadalmak egyik meghatározó sajátossága a társadalmi idő és tapasztalat felgyorsulása, valamint a bizonytalanság intézményesülése. A munka, az életutak és a társadalmi kapcsolatok egyre kevésbé maradnak stabilak, miközben az egyénekre nehezedő döntési és alkalmazkodási kényszer folyamatosan és dinamikusan növekszik (Giddens, 1991; Rosa, 2013). A társadalmi gyorsulás, noha makroszintű folyamat, a mindennapi élet érzéki tapasztalatában is megjelenik időhiányként, fragmentált figyelemként, vagy éppen állandó ingerterhelés formájában.

Ebben a kontextusban az egyén egy önmagát folyamatosan alakítandó projektként jelenik meg (vö. Giddens, 1991). Az identitás reflexív szervezése a késő modern élet egyik alapkövetelménye, amely azonban egyre gyakrabban válik túlterhelővé, különösen akkor, amikor a cselekvési lehetőségek bővülése nem jár együtt a strukturális biztonság növekedésével (Giddens, 1991).

Governmentality és az önmenedzselő szubjektum

A késő modernitás működésének megértéséhez kulcsfontosságú a kormányozhatóság (governmentality) fogalmának a bevonása. Kritikai megközelítések rámutatnak arra, hogy a hatalom nem elsősorban külső kényszerként, hanem internalizált normákon keresztül működik (Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1999; Han, 2015, Han, 2017). A társadalom tagjai saját magukat kormányozzák azáltal, hogy a társadalmi problémákat egyéni felelősségként és megküzdési feladatként értelmezik, aminek a háttérében komplex diskurzív és intézményi mechanizmusok állnak.

Ebben a keretben az empowerment és a reziliencia nem „egyszerűen” leíró fogalmak, hanem normatív elvárásokként lebegnek az egyének feje fölött. A „jó” szubjektum rugalmas, alkalmazkodó, érzelmileg szabályozott és képes saját életének menedzselésére (vö. Han, 2015; Han, 2020), ehhez kapcsolódóan pedig az empowerment szükségképpen sem lehet semleges eszköz. Sok esetben olyan diskurzív mechanizmusként működik, amely a strukturális egyenlőtlenségeket az önfejlesztés és az affektív alkalmazkodás nyelvére fordítja le (Cruikshank, 1999; Brown, 2015; Székely, 2015).

Az affektív dimenzió és az empowerment kritikája

A kormányozhatóság működésének egyik központi eleme az affektív dimenzió. Az érzelmek és érzelmi orientációk társadalmilag szervezett és normatív módon szabályozott működésekként is tetten érhetők (Ahmed, 2004; Hochschild, 1983). Az olyan affektív normák, mint a pozitivitás, a rugalmasság vagy a kitartás, nem csupán reakciók a bizonytalanságra, hanem a cselekvés strukturáló feltételeiként is működhetnek.

Az empowerment ebben a keretben több egymással összefonódó dimenzióban ragadható meg. Diskurzív értelemben, az önrendelkezés és a választás nyelveként, affektív szinten, az alkalmazkodás és az önszabályozás normáiként; harmadrészt strukturális értelemben, a tényleges cselekvési lehetőségek bővüléseként. A késő modern kontextusban azonban az első két dimenzió gyakran dominánssá válik, miközben a strukturális feltételek változatlanok maradnak. Ennek következtében a strukturális feszültségek individualizálódhatnak, és a megküzdés az egyén szintjén válik kötelező, megoldandó feladattá (Fraser, 1997; Honneth, 1995).

Az empowerment kritikája ebben az értelemben arra mutat rá, hogy az önrendelkezés és az egyéni felelősség nyelve elfedheti a problémák strukturális eredetét. Amikor a társadalmi feszültségek egyéni megküzdési feladatként jelennek meg, a felelősség a társadalmi és intézményi feltételekről az egyénre helyeződik át. Így a kritika tárgya nem maga az egyéni cselekvőképesség, hanem az a folyamat, amelyben a strukturális problémák kezelése az egyén önfejlesztési és önszabályozási kötelességévé válik.

Diszpozíciók és környezeti súrlódás

Jelen tanulmány az egyéni cselekvés értelmezéséhez Bernard Lahire diszpozícióelméletére támaszkodik, amely Pierre Bourdieu homogén habitusfelfogását bírálja. Bourdieu és Lahire elméleti hagyományában a diszpozíció eredetileg olyan társadalmilag kialakított, belsővé vált hajlamot vagy beállítódást jelent, amely a korábbi szocializációs tapasztalatok nyomán irányítja az egyén észlelését, érzéseit és cselekvéseit (Bourdieu, 1990; Lahire, 2011). Lahire megközelítése szerint az egyének nem egységes habitussal rendelkeznek, hanem különböző társadalmi kontextusokban kialakult diszpozíciókkal bírnak (Lahire, 2011). A tanulmány diszpozíció alatt olyan korábbi tapasztalatokból, szocializációs helyzetekből és ismétlődő gyakorlatokból kialakuló beállítódásokat ért, amelyek meghatározzák, hogy az egyén milyen helyzeteket él meg természetesnek, kényelmesnek, feszültségkeltőnek vagy idegennek. Ilyen diszpozíció

lehet például a csendes, alacsony intenzitású környezethez való vonzódás, a testi és anyagi folyamatok feletti kontroll igénye, vagy a közvetlen, személyes kapcsolatok előnyben részesítése a technológiailag közvetített interakciókkal szemben. Bernard Lahire (2011) szerint az egyénben nem egyetlen, egységes diszpozíció működik, hanem több, eltérő eredetű és eltérő irányba mutató beállítódás kapcsolódhat össze. Ezek a diszpozíciók nem minden környezetben kompatibilisek, ami súrlódásokhoz és illeszkedési problémákhoz vezethet.

A konfiguráció fogalma ezért azt segít megragadni, hogy egy konkrét élethelyzetben mely orientációk aktiválódnak, ezek hogyan erősítik vagy gyengítik egymást, és milyen cselekvési mintázatot hoznak létre. Környezeti súrlódás akkor jön létre, amikor az egyén korábbi tapasztalataiból kialakult beállítódásai nem illeszkednek ahhoz a társadalmi vagy intézményi környezethez, amelyben cselekednie kell (vö. Lahire 2011). A környezeti súrlódás tehát nem egyenlő a belső bizonytalansággal vagy a személyes elégedetlenséggel, hanem a diszpozíciók és a környezeti elvárások közötti feszültségként kerülnek értelmezésre. Ilyen súrlódás jelenhet meg például akkor, amikor cselekvési feltételekre irányuló orientációk egy gyors, mediált és folyamatos jelenlétet elváró környezetben válnak az egyén számára nehezen fenntarthatóvá.

A tanulmány saját hozzájárulása abban áll, hogy az empirikus elemzésben nem különálló diszpozíciókat vizsgál, hanem azt, hogy ezek az orientációk miként kapcsolódnak össze egy konkrét életútban, és hogyan kerülnek feszültségbe a késő modern társadalmi környezet domináns működésmódjaival. A túlterheltség a Lahire-i keretet alapul véve nem kizárólag „sok inger” együttes, összeadódó következménye, hanem a diszpozíciók és a társadalmi környezet közötti feszültség megnyilvánulásaként is felfogható. Következésképp a problémát nem az alkalmazkodás hiánya, hanem az inkompatibilitás jelenti, vagyis amikor az egyén olyan környezetben próbál működni, amelyhez diszpozíciói ahhoz nem illeszkednek. Ez elvezet az egyén életmódbeli preferenciának látszó orientációk vizsgálatához, azaz oda, hogy miként állnak ezek össze olyan diszpozíciós konfigurációvá, amely bizonyos késő modern környezetekben súrlódást termelnek.

Környezeti megküzdés és szelektív kivonódás

A fenti elméleti keret lehetővé teszi egy alternatív megküzdési forma megragadását. A domináns modellekkel szemben, amelyek a cselekvést javarészt kapacitásnövelésként értelmezik, a tanulmány a *környezeti megküzdés* fogalmát vezeti be. A környezeti megküzdés olyan cselekvési logikaként fogható fel, amelyben a megküzdés nem a szubjektum adaptív kapacitásainak növelésén keresztül valósul meg, hanem azon keresztül, ahogyan az egyén aktívan újraszabályozza, milyen intenzitású és minőségű társadalmi, technológiai és affektív expozíciónak teszi ki önmagát.

Ez a megküzdési forma szorosan kapcsolódik a *szelektív kivonódás* jelenségéhez. A kivonódás ebben az értelemben a társadalmi részvétel mértékének és módjának reflexív újraszabályozását jelenti, azaz a cselekvés így nem a rendszerben való hatékonyabb működésre, hanem annak hatásainak szelektív korlátozására irányul. Ez a mindennapi ellenállás olyan formáival rokonítható, amelyek nyílt konfrontációk helyett a részvétel feltételeinek átalakításán keresztül fejtik ki hatásukat (Scott, 1985; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

A szelektív kivonódás ilyen értelmezése ugyanakkor nem azonosítható automatikusan azokkal a késő modern életmód-diskurzusokkal, amelyek a visszavonulást, a digitális detoxot, a downshiftinget vagy az önkéntes egyszerűséget elsősorban az autentikusabb élet, a fogyasztói túlterhelés vagy a folyamatos online jelenlét kritikájaként írják le (Sutton, 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020; Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Ezek a megközelítések fontos kontextust adnak ahhoz, hogy a lekapcsolódás és a részvétel csökkentése a késő modern társadalmakban szélesebb kulturális jelenségként is értelmezhető. A jelen tanulmány azonban a visszavonulás divatszerű, piacosított vagy önsegítő formái helyett azt járja körül, amikor a részvétel mértékének csökkentése a diszpozíciók és a társadalmi környezet közötti súrlódásra adott sajátos megküzdési logikájává válhat.

A mindennapi ellenállás újragondolása

James C. Scott (1985) klasszikus megközelítése szerint a kivonódás a mindennapi ellenállás egy sajátos formájaként is értelmezhető. Hollander és Einwohner (2004) ugyanakkor rámutatnak arra, hogy az ellenállás fogalma analitikusan több dimenzió mentén is megragadható: az aktor szándéka, a cselekvés társadalmi hatása és a kutatói interpretáció alapján is megragadható.

A tanulmány e megközelítésekhez kapcsolódva az *ellenállás* fogalmát nem aktori szándékként vagy explicit politikai cselekvésként alkalmazza, hanem analitikus kategóriaként annak érdekében, hogy láthatóvá tegye azokat a gyakorlatokat, amelyekben a részvétel módjának és mértékének korlátozása, illetve a domináns társadalmi működésmódoktól való eltérés empirikusan megragadhatóvá válik. Ebben az értelemben az ellenállás nem feltétlenül tudatos vagy deklarált cselekvésként fogható meg, hanem a cselekvés strukturális következményei felől válik értelmezhetővé (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

A visszavonulás következeképp a társadalmi részvétel hiánya, vagy passzivitás helyett a késő modern működésmódok aktív, szelektív újrendezésekként is értelmezhető.

A megküzdés átrendeződése a késő modernitásban

A bemutatott elméleti keret egy központi analitikus következtetés megfogalmazását teszi lehetővé. A késő modern társadalmakban a strukturális feszültségek átalakulnak, hiszen a kollektív konfliktusok mellett egyre gyakrabban jelennek meg individualizált, affektív és narratív megküzdési formákban. A tanulmány egy ilyen alternatív cselekvési logikát vizsgál, ahol a cselekvés a részvétel mértékének csökkentésén és a mindennapi életvilág feltételeinek újrászervezésén keresztül válik megragadhatóvá.

Ebben az értelemben a megküzdés átrendeződése a részvétel mennyiségi csökkentése helyett az egyéni újrászabályozásra helyezi a hangsúlyt, arra, hogy milyen ingereknek, technológiai közvetítéseknek, kapcsolati elvárásoknak és mindennapi ritmusoknak teszi ki magát. A környezeti megküzdés ezáltal a késő modern társadalmi környezethez való viszony aktív újrendezési módjaként értelmezhető.

Módszertan: narratív életútinterjú és hermeneutikai esetrekonstrukció

A tanulmány kvalitatív kutatási designra épül, amely egyetlen eset analitikus feldolgozásán keresztül vizsgálja a késő modern túlterheltségre adott válaszformákat. A cél nem reprezentatív általánosítás, hanem egy olyan fogalmi konfiguráció feltárása, amely hozzájárul a strukturális feszültségek és az egyéni cselekvés közötti viszony értelmezéséhez. Az eset elméletileg informatív konfigurációt képvisel, amelyen keresztül tágabb társadalmi működésmódok válhatnak megragadhatóvá. Saját elemzésemben ezért az interjúkat nem illusztratív példaként, hanem olyan narratív konstrukciókként

kezelem, amelyekben az egyéni élettörténet és a társadalmi tapasztalat egymást kölcsönösen értelmezik (Vajda & Kovács, 2002; Gyursánszky & Zsille, 2025; Gyursánszky, 2025; Kiss et al. 2025).

Az empirikus elemzés alapját egy narratív életútinterjú képezi. A narratív interjú módszere abból az alapfeltevésből indul ki, hogy az egyének történeteken keresztül értelmezik tapasztalataikat, és ezek a narratívák nem egyszerűen eseményleírások, hanem jelentésképző struktúrák (Rosenthal, 1993; Vajda & Kovács, 2002; Vajda, 2003; Kovács, 2007; Vajda, 2020). E megközelítés az élettörténeti kutatás hazai hagyományában is megalapozott (Vajda & Kovács, 2002), és lehetővé teszi, hogy az interjúalany saját logikája szerint szervezze meg elbeszélését. A módszer kiemelt célja az életvilág belső összefüggéseinek feltárása (Kovács, 2011).

Az interjú kontextusa

Az interjú az NKFIH K 143092 számú, Vajda Júlia által vezetett „Demokratikus viselkedés és joghoz való viszony családtörténeti háttérben” című kutatási projekt keretében készült. Az interjúalany a beszélgetés előtt arról kapott tájékoztatást, hogy egy, a magyar társadalmi valóságot vizsgáló kutatásban vesz részt, amelynek fókuszában a családtörténet, az egyéni élettörténet, valamint mindezek társadalmi tapasztalatokhoz és viselkedésmódokhoz való kapcsolódása áll. Az interjú az alábbi nyitókérdéssel indult: *„Kérem, mesélje el családtörténetét és saját élettörténetét!”*

Ennek megfelelően Emmi tapasztalatai az első pillanattól kezdve nem a kutatás vagy az interjúkészítő által előre kijelölt tematikus blokkokként kerültek kifejezésre, hanem az élettörténeti elbeszélés saját logikája mentén, visszatérő motívumokként szerveződtek. A jelen tanulmány ezekből a motívumokból indul ki, és azt vizsgálja, hogy miként rajzolódik ki rajtuk keresztül egy olyan cselekvési logika, amely a késő modern túlterheltségre nem az alkalmazkodás fokozásával, hanem a közvetlenség, a kontroll és az alacsonyabb ingerintenzitás iránti orientációval és az ingerterhelésnek való kitettség feltételeinek újraszabályozásával válaszol.

Az eset biográfiai háttére

Az interjúalany az interjú felvételekor 28 éves, középosztályi családi háttérrel rendelkező nő, Emmi, aki életútja során fokozatosan a természetgyógyászat, valamint a testorientált gyakorlatok, a Feldenkrais-módszer felé fordul, távolodva a fővárostól, eredeti szakmájától, majd fokozatosan a szülővárosától is.

Budakeszin született, kertés házaspár, kertvárosias közegben. Az óvodát és az általános iskolát is szülővárosában végezte, ezáltal egész gyermekkorát a kertvárosias közeg jellemezte. Szülei keveset mesél, egy testvére van, Eszter. Középosztálybeli családi háttere, a biztos anyagi háttér biztosította Emminek a stabil lakhatáshoz, a továbbtanuláshoz szükséges erőforrásokat. Középiskolai tanulmányait szociális ágazati képzésben végezte, amelynek részeként 17 évesen több, gondozáshoz és ellátáshoz kapcsolódó intézményi közegben is teljesített szakmai gyakorlatot. A középiskola befejezése után kisgyermekneveléshez kapcsolódó felsőfokú képzésben tanult tovább, majd ezen a területen dolgozott.

Középiskolás éve alatt kezdődött egy öt évig tartó párkapcsolata, amely végigkísérte a középiskola befejezését, a felsőfokú tanulmányok kezdetét, valamint húszas éve elejének több fontos eseményét. A kapcsolat az interjú idejére már lezárult.

Gyermekkorától rendszeresen sportolt, majd későbbi egészségügyi, testi panaszai miatt fokozatosan más, regenerációhoz és testtudatosságához kapcsolódó mozgásformák felé fordult. Fiatal felnőttként különböző testi és természetgyógyászati kezeléseket vett részt, később pedig maga is természetgyógyászati tanulmányokba kezdett. Életútja során fokozatosan a testorientált gyakorlatok, és kifejezetten a Feldenkrais-módszer felé fordult.

A húszas éveiben egyre hangsúlyosabbá vált számára a lakóhely és az életforma kérdése. Az interjú első részében még jövőbeli tervként beszél arról, hogy a fővárostól távolabbi, természetközelibb közegbe szeretne költözni, nagyobb kerttel, természetes építkezési formákkal, veteményeskerttel és esetleg állatokkal. A második interjú idején már megtörtént a költözés, Emmi egy kisebb, elmondása szerint természetközelibb településre költözött, Tinnyére. Az új lakóhelyen még átmeneti lakhatási helyzetben volt, munkája és helyi beilleszkedése alakulóban volt.

Az interjúhelyzet és az elbeszélés módja

Az eset kiválasztása nem reprezentativitási szempontokat követett, hanem azt a célt szolgálta, hogy egy analitikusan informatív konfiguráción keresztül tegye vizsgálhatóvá a diszpozíciók és a társadalmi környezet közötti feszültségeket.

Az adatfelvétel két eltérő interakciós helyzetben zajlott. Az első interjú intézményi környezetben történt, ahol az interjúalany a hangfelvétel jelenléte miatt láthatóan feszélyezve érezte magát, és többször kérte a felvétel megszakítását. A második alkalomra

saját otthonában került sor, ahol oldottabb módon, ugyanakkor továbbra is reflektáltan beszélt tapasztalatairól. Az interjúhelyzet így egyszerre szolgált adatforrásként, mint az elemzés részét képező interakciós térként; a technológiai mediációval szembeni ambivalencia nemcsak a narratív tartalomban, hanem a beszéd performatív szerveződésében is megjelent.

Elemzési eljárás

Az elemzés hermeneutikai esetrekonstrukcióval történt és a narratívák mögött húzódó jelentésstruktúrák feltárására irányult (Rosenthal, 1993; Vajda & Kovács, 2002; Kovács, 2007). E megközelítés központi jellemzője a megélt és az elbeszélt élettörténet között húzódik, hiszen míg az előbbi az események rekonstruálható rendjére utal, az utóbbi azt mutatja meg, hogy az egyén miként szervezi tapasztalatait narratív formába (Vajda & Kovács, 2002). A kettő közötti viszony elemzése teszi lehetővé a társadalmi jelentések rekonstruálását.

Az elemzés során ezért a „mit mond” kérdés és a „hogyan mondja” dimenzió egyenrangúak voltak, ennek megfelelően a narratív struktúra, a hangsúlyok, az ismétlődő motívumok, valamint a megszakítások és elhallgatások egyaránt az értelmezés részévé váltak, csakúgy, mint a hangnem és az affektív jelölések változásai. Ez a megközelítés lehetővé teszi, hogy az implicit jelentések, amelyek nem direkt állításokként, hanem narratív szervezőelvekként jelennek meg, is feltárhatóvá váljanak (Kovács, 2011). Az elemzés ennek megfelelően nemcsak a visszatérő témák azonosítására irányult, hanem arra is, hogy az interjúalany mely pontokon kezd el indokolni, magyarázni, ellenpontokat felállítani vagy normatív különbségeket megfogalmazni. Kopperschmidt argumentációelemzési megközelítése alapján az érvelés nem formális logikai szerkezet, hanem olyan beszédmód, amelyben a beszélő vitathatóvá váló tapasztalatokat, értékeket vagy állításokat tesz elfogadhatóvá (Kopperschmidt, 1995). Ebből a szempontból különösen fontosak voltak azok a narratív szakaszok, ahol Emmi nem egyszerűen eseményeket idézett fel, hanem hosszan indokolta, hogy bizonyos életformákat, gyakorlatokat vagy környezeti feltételeket miért tart kívánatosnak, élhetőnek vagy problematikusnak.

A szövegben szereplő idézetek kiválasztása az elemzés szempontjából releváns jelentésmintázatok kiemelése alapján történt. Olyan visszatérő motívumokat tesznek láthatóvá, mint például az ingerterhelés, a természethez való orientáció vagy a mediált

kapcsolatokkal szembeni távolságtartás. Ezek a diszpozíciós konfiguráció és a környezeti megküzdés értelmezésének alapját jelentik.

Limitációk

A tanulmány egyetlen esetre épülő elemzése nem a reprezentativitás, hanem az analitikus általánosíthatóság logikájában értelmezhető. A cél nem a késő modern társadalmak működésmódjainak empirikus leképezése, hanem egy olyan fogalmi konfiguráció feltárása, amelyen keresztül bizonyos strukturális feszültségek és cselekvési formák értelmezhetővé válnak.

Ugyanakkor fontos hangsúlyozni, hogy a vizsgált életstratégia, különösen a vidéki környezetbe való visszavonulás és az expozíció csökkentésére irányuló gyakorlatok, társadalmilag nem egyenlő módon hozzáférhetők. Az ilyen típusú környezeti újraszervezés bizonyos erőforrások meglétét feltételezi, legyen szó anyagi, kulturális vagy kapcsolati tőkéről. Ennek megfelelően az elemzett eset nem választható el az osztályhelyezettől, a nemi szerepektől és az életút sajátosságaitól, amelyek együttesen strukturálják a rendelkezésre álló cselekvési lehetőségeket.

Az elemzés interpretatív jellegéből következik, hogy a feltárt jelentések nem a „valóság” közvetlen leképezései, hanem egy meghatározott elméleti perspektíván keresztül konstruált értelmezések. Jelen tanulmányban ez a perspektíva a késő modernitás, a kormányozhatóság és a diszpozícióelmélet fogalmi horizontjához kötődik, ami egyben kijelöli az elemzés értelmezési tartományát is. Más elméleti keretek eltérő olvasatokat tehetnének lehetővé.

E megfontolások nem az elemzés korlátozottságát, hanem annak érvényességi feltételeit jelölik ki. A tanulmány hozzájárulása így nem általános érvényű állítások megfogalmazásában ragadható meg, hanem abban, hogy egy konkrét eset részletes elemzésén keresztül olyan fogalmi eszközöket kínál, amelyek más kontextusok értelmezésében is produktívan alkalmazhatók.

Elemzés

Az elemzés előtt fontos jelezni, hogy az itt tárgyalt motívumok nem az életútból kiragadott, izolált válaszokként, hanem az élettörténeti elbeszélés visszatérő elemeiként jelentek meg. Az interjúszöveg hermeneutikai esetrekonstruóval történő elemzése során láthatóvá vált, hogy Emmi narratívája a gyermekkori környezet, a családi és társas tapasztalatok, valamint a későbbi szakmai és életmódbeli választások összekapcsolásán

keresztül bontakozott ki. A természethez való kötődés először gyermekkori emlékek kapcsán jelent meg, majd később a jelenlegi életmód, a testi gyakorlatok, az étkezés, a technológiai közvetítettség és a vidéki élet folyamatos értékelésében tért vissza.

Az elemzésben diszpozíciós konfiguráció alatt nem Emmi egy-egy személyiségvonását és kiváltképp nem stabil habitusát értem, hanem több, egymással összekapcsolódó beállítódás együttállását a narratívában, amely az interjúalany élettörténeti elbeszéléséből és visszatérő gyakorlataiból vált rekonstruálhatóvá.

Az elemzés logikáját az 1. ábra foglalja össze:



1. ábra A diszpozíciós súrlódás és a környezeti megküzdés folyamata (Saját szerkesztés)

Az alábbiakban az ábra által jelzett folyamat egyes elemeit empirikus példákon keresztül bontom ki.

Diszpozíciós súrlódás és környezeti megküzdés

Diszpozíciós konfiguráció: érzéki orientáció, kontroll és közvetlenség

Az interjúalany narratívájában viszonylag koherens, több dimenzióban megjelenő diszpozíciós konfiguráció rajzolódik ki, amelynek központi eleme a közvetlen, érzéki és kontrollált világ iránti orientáció. Ez a beállítódás nem egyetlen élethelyzethez vagy döntéshez kapcsolódik, hanem a mindennapi gyakorlatok széles körében következetesen megjelenő mintázatként rekonstruálható.

Az egyik meghatározó dimenzió az érzéki tapasztalathoz való viszony. Az interjúalany már a gyermekkori élmények felidézése során is ezt az orientációt emeli ki:

„sokat a fa alá kifelédtünk a kertbe [...] már akkor is szerettem nagyon a természetet”.

Ez a korai tapasztalat nem elszigetelt emlékként jelenik meg, hanem olyan kontinuum részeként, amely a jelenbeli orientációkat is strukturálja. A természethez való viszony ebben az értelmezésben nem instrumentális, nem pusztán kikapcsolódásként jelenik meg, hanem alapvetően érzéki és affektív jellegű:

„csak az eget nézed, vagy csak sétálsz egyet és akkor [...] nézed a vizet a fákat”.

A leírás hangsúlya az alacsony intenzitású, megszakítatlan jelenlétben van, amelyet az interjúalany expliciten szembeállít a mindennapi élet ingerterhelésével:

„nincsen állandó ugráltatás vagy [...] nagy zajok sok impulzus”.

Az „egyszerű dolgok” hangsúlyozása így nem nosztalgikus retorikaként, hanem olyan érzéki orientációként értelmezhető, amely a nyugalmat, a kontrollálhatóságot és a megszakítatlan figyelmet részesíti előnyben. Ebben az értelemben a természet nem pusztán helyszín, hanem olyan környezeti konfiguráció, amelyben az interjúalany diszpozíciói súrlódásmentesebben működhetnek.

Ezzel szemben a jelenkori életvilág mediált, ingerintenzív és időszűkös környezetként jelenik meg:

„manapság mindenhol telefon számítástechnikai dolgok [...] az embereknek semmi ideje nincs”.

A jelen tapasztalata tehát nem egyszerűen modernitáskritikaként, hanem illeszkedési problémaként artikulálódik. A túlterheltség nem pusztán a sok inger következménye, hanem annak a környezetnek a tapasztalata, amely nem kompatibilis az Emmi érzéki működésmódjával:

„egy kicsit hiányzik [...] hogy az emberek meg tudjanak nyugodni”.

Szorosan összefügg ezzel a kontroll iránti igény, amely nem absztrakt önfegyelemként, elsősorban a test, az étel és az anyagi környezet feletti átláthatóság igényeként válik láthatóvá. Emmi elbeszélésében az étkezés nem jelent egyet

egészségtudatos választások sorozatával, hanem olyan kiemelt területként van jelen, ahol a test jelzései, az összetevők ellenőrzése, a beszerzés módja és a saját készítés gyakorlata egymásba kapcsolódnak:

„... már akkor is elgondolkoztam azon, hogy mi az, amit enni szeretnék, mi az, amit igazán kívánok, hogy az egészséges vagy nem egészséges [...] onnantól így nagyon megváltozott, mert elkezdtem teljesen másképp gondolkozni és más ételeket enni, és nagyon odafigyeltem a táplálkozásra, hogy mit eszek [...] az utóbbi pár évben mindig el szoktam olvasni, hogyha új terméket veszek, hogy mi van benne [...] ez a táplálkozás nagyon meghatározó volt nekem, mert éreztem is, hogy sokkal másabban érzem magam, és egy idő után azt érezte a testem is, hogy amit régebben finomnak találtam, az most már nem [...] sokat főzök egyébként, tehát magamnak szoktam főzni [...] nagyon kevés mindent veszek meg a boltban, inkább a piacra járok ki [...] vagy ismerősöktől, barátoktól vesszük mondjuk a tojást [...] inkább vagy megtermelni magamnak [...] a kenyeret is amúgy magamnak szoktam csinálni, tehát kovászos kenyeret sütök, és azt is próbálom, a lisztet is külön malomból szoktam rendelni...”

A táplálkozásról szóló részletek azért kapnak kitüntetett jelentőséget az elemzésben, mert Emmi hosszan argumentál amellett, hogy milyen feltételek között érzi magát jól, és milyen típusú környezetet tart élhetőnek. A narratívában az étel az elemzés egyik fő szövege (vö. Vajda, 2003). Nem elszigetelt életmódtéma, hanem olyan sűrű pont, ahol a test, az anyag, az átláthatóság, a természetesség és az autonóm cselekvés egymásba fordulnak. Amikor arról beszél, hogy elolvassa, *„mi van benne”*, hogy figyeli, *„mit eszik”* stb., Emmi egyszerű fogyasztói preferenciák helyett érvel amellett, hogy számára az élhető környezet egyik alapfeltétele az anyagi folyamatok átláthatósága és kontrollálhatósága.

Ezekben a részletekben válik a legvilágosabbá, hogy ez a típusú kontrolligény testi és gyakorlati tapasztalat. Emmi nem érvel expliciten amellett, hogy kontrollálni akarja az életét, ahogyan amellett sem, hogy mindez a késő modern, standardizált és átláthatatlan rendszerekkel szembeni távolságtartás stratégiája.

Ehelyett azt beszéli el, ahogyan a teste visszajelzései, az ételek összetevői, a beszerzés helye, a főzés, a kenyérsütés és a saját termelés mind olyan gyakorlatok, amelyekben csökkenthető a közvetítettség és növelhető a saját részvétel. Az ételről való

hosszas beszéd így az elemzés szempontjából azért is döntő, mert egyik eleme annak a szövetnek (vö. Vajda, 2003), amelyen keresztül empirikusan megragadhatóvá válik az a *diszpozíciós konfiguráció*, amelyet a tanulmány érzéki orientációként, kontrolligényként és közvetlenségre törekvésként ír le. A gyermekkori kert és természet felidézése megmutatja az alacsony ingerintenzitás iránti vonzódást, a vidéki köszönés példája a kapcsolati közvetlenség igényét, de az ételről, testről és összetevőkről szóló részben ez a két irány összeér: Emmi itt egyszerre beszél a természetesebb anyagi világhoz való kapcsolódásról, a saját test érzékeny figyeléséről és arról, hogy a közvetített rendszerek helyett átláthatóbb, személyesebb és saját kezűleg alakítható gyakorlatokat keres.

Itt látszik, hogy a környezeti megküzdés az interjúalany saját narratívájában is visszatérő cselekvési logika: a terhelőnek, idegennek vagy átláthatatlannak érzékelt környezet helyett olyan helyzeteket, anyagokat, kapcsolatokat és ritmusokat keres, amelyekben a test, az érzékelés és a cselekvés újra közvetlenebb kapcsolatba kerülhet egymással.

A harmadik dimenzió a társas kapcsolatokhoz való viszony. A kapcsolati közvetlenség sem általános közösségideálként, hanem a mindennapi érintkezés minimális, mégis jelentéssel telített formáiban ölt testet. Emmi a vidéki közeget többek között azért írja le vonzóként, mert ott a másik ember nem anonim tömegként, hanem megszólítható és elismerhető jelenlétként jelenik meg:

„ott mindenkiel megtisztelnak azzal, hogy köszönnek neki” [...] „szeretettel fogadják akkor is, ha nem ismerik” [...] „jobban összetartóbb közösség mint a nagyvárosokban”.

A köszönés Emmi számára nem pusztán udvariassági norma, hanem a társas világ alacsony intenzitású, de közvetlen kapcsolódási formája. A vidéki közeg így a kapcsolati átláthatóság és informális elismerés terepe, míg a nagyvárosi lét kritikája a kapcsolati távolság, anonimitás és fragmentáció tapasztalatára irányul.

A három dimenzió az interjúban nem egyetlen életszakaszhoz vagy tematikus blokkhoz kötődik, hanem eltérő élettörténeti helyzetekben tér vissza. Ez a három dimenzió, az *érzéki orientáció*, a *kontrolligény* és a *kapcsolati közvetlenség* olyan diszpozíciós konfigurációt alkot, amely Emmi számára bizonyos környezeteket otthonosnak és működtethetőnek, másokat viszont túl intenzívnek, közvetítettnek vagy idegennek tesz. Ezek a konfigurációk bizonyos környezetekben kompatibilisek,

másokban azonban súrlódásba kerülnek. Ezért az elemzésben a természethez, az ételhez, a testhez és a társas kapcsolatokhoz való viszony ugyanannak az illeszkedési problémának eltérő felületeiként kerülnek tárgyalásra.

Diszpozíciós súrlódás: inkompatibilitás a késő modern környezettel

Az elemzés célja nem kizárólag a diszpozíciók leírása, hanem annak bemutatása, hogy ezek milyen viszonyba kerülnek a késő modern társadalmi környezet domináns működésmódjaival. Az érzéki orientáció egy olyan közegben válik feszültségforrássá, amelyet magas ingerterhelés, folyamatos elérhetőség és állandó jelenlétkényszer jellemez. A gyorsulás, a technológiai mediáció és az ingerbőség olyan feltételeket hoznak létre, amelyek nem illeszkednek az interjúalany által preferált érzéki működésmódhoz.

A materiális gyakorlatok szintjén ugyanez az inkompatibilitás az ipari élelmiszer-előállítással és a standardizált fogyasztási formákkal szemben válik láthatóvá. A közvetlen, átlátható és kontrollált folyamatok iránti igény nehezen egyeztethető össze azokkal a rendszerekkel, amelyekben a termelés, a fogyasztás és a testtel kapcsolatos döntések egyre inkább közvetítetté válnak.

A kapcsolati dimenzióban a súrlódás a mediált és fragmentált kapcsolatokat problémájaként jelenik meg. A társas viszonyok flexibilisebbé és közvetítettebbé válása az interjúalany narratívájában a felszínesség és a kapcsolati távolság tapasztalatával kapcsolódik össze.

Különösen jelentős, hogy a technológiai mediációval szembeni ambivalencia nemcsak a narratív tartalomban, hanem az interjúhelyzet performatív szerveződésében is megfigyelhető. Az interjúalany többször reflektál a felvétel jelenlétére, és ismételten kéri annak megszakítását:

„kicsit feszélyezve érzem magam”.

Emmi szavai nem kizárólag a módszertant illető zavaró tényezőként értelmezhetők, hanem a vizsgált tapasztalat részét képező jelenséggént. A technológiai mediációval szembeni távolságtartás nemcsak tematizált állításként, hanem a beszéd szerveződésében is megjelenik: a megszakítások, önkorrekciók és kontrollált megszólalások mind a mediált helyzetre adott reakciókként értelmezhetők. A felvétel ebben az értelemben nem semleges eszköz, hanem olyan mediációs forma, amely felerősíti a kontroll, az önszabályozás és a reflexivitás igényét.

A diszpozíciós súrlódás tehát három szinten azonosítható: az érzéki tapasztalat, a materiális gyakorlatok és a társas kapcsolatok szintjén. A probléma nem az alkalmazkodási képesség hiánya, hanem a diszpozíciók és a domináns környezeti feltételek közötti illeszkedési zavar.

Környezeti megküzdés: az expozíció újraszabályozása

A diszpozíciós inkompatibilitásra adott válasz az elemzett esetben nem az alkalmazkodás vagy a kapacitásnövelés irányába mozdul el, hanem a környezeti feltételek tudatos újraszervezésében jelenik meg. A környezeti megküzdés cselekvési logikája nem az egyéni tűrőképesség fokozására, hanem az expozíciós feltételek szelektív korlátozására és újraszabályozására irányul.

Emmi esetében ez több szinten is megfigyelhető. A térbeli elmozdulások, a mindennapi gyakorlatok átalakítása, valamint a mediált rendszerektől való részleges eltávolodás mind az expozíció szintjét érintik. Ide tartozik a saját ételkészítés, a piaci beszerzés, a részleges önellátás, a természetközeli életmód és a mediált kapcsolatok korlátozása.

A környezeti megküzdés logikája különösen élesen jelenik meg az Emmi számára oly fontos nomád tábor tapasztalataiban. Az ott átételeket a modern kényelmi infrastruktúráktól való részleges eltávolodáshoz, a vidéki élethez és a természetközelséghez kapcsolja. Emmi egy néhány napos, Tisza-menti nyaralást idéz fel újra és újra, ahol barátokkal sátorban aludtak, maguknak főztek, és előre kellett gondoskodniuk az alapvető szükségletekről. A melegvizes zuhany, a mosdó, a vásárlási lehetőség és az elektromos eszközök folyamatos használatának hiánya kezdetben szokatlan, részben kiszolgáltatott helyzetként jelenik meg:

„...nem volt ott semmilyen lehetőség... az erdőben aludtunk... nincs melegvizes zuhany... nem tudsz venni semmit...”

A táborhely az expozíció radikális csökkentéseként írható le: minimális technológiai mediáció, alacsony ingerterhelés és közvetlen társas jelenlét jellemzi.

„nincs egy telefoncsörgés meg munkaügy [...] hanem tényleg maximum csak a természet zaja”

Az élmény az interjúalany leírásában nem hiányként, hanem pozitív tapasztalatként jelenik meg:

„mennyire ki tudja ez az embert teljesen kapcsolni [...] és jól is érzi magát az ember”.

Ez a helyzet nem pusztán csökkenti, hanem újraszervezi a kitettség feltételeit. A cselekvés így nem a rendszerben való hatékonyabb működésre, hanem annak hatásainak korlátozására irányul. Ebben az értelemben a visszavonulás nem passzív kivonulásként, hanem aktív környezeti újraszervezésként értelmezhető, amely során az egyén szelektíven alakítja át azt a környezetet, amelyben működik.

Következmények: identitás, cselekvés és ellenállás

A fent tárgyalt folyamatok túlmutatnak az életmódválasztás szintjén. A diszpozíciós konfiguráció, a súrlódás és a környezeti megküzdés együtt olyan identitásformát rajzolnak ki, amely a részvétel szelektív korlátozására épül (vö. Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

Az interjúalany nem hagyja el teljes mértékben a késő modern rendszereket, hanem azok bizonyos elemeitől távolodik el, miközben másokhoz továbbra is kapcsolódik. Ez a részleges kivonódás nem radikális elszakadásként, hanem a részvétel feltételeinek újraszabályozásaként értelmezhető.

Ebben az értelemben a vizsgált eset a mindennapi ellenállás sajátos formájaként ragadható meg. Az ellenállás fogalma itt nem feltétlenül aktori szándékot jelöl, hanem analitikus kategóriaként működik: olyan gyakorlatokra utal, amelyek a részvétel módjának és mértékének korlátozásán keresztül térnek el a domináns társadalmi működésmódoktól (Scott, 1985; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

A cselekvés így egyszerre értelmezhető egyéni életstratégiaként és implicit társadalomkritikaként. A tanulmány központi állítása ebből következően az, hogy a késő modern túlterheltségre adott válaszok nem redukálhatók az alkalmazkodás vagy a reziliencia különböző formáira. Az elemzett eset egy olyan alternatív cselekvési logikát tesz megragadhatóvá, amelyben a praxis nem a fennálló feltételekhez való igazodásban, hanem az expozíció strukturális feltételeinek reflexív újraszabályozásában artikulálódik.

Következtetések: a megküzdés újrendeződése a késő modernitásban

Az elemzés egy olyan cselekvési logikát tesz láthatóvá, amely több ponton is eltér a késő modern társadalmakban domináns értelmezési keretektől. Az eltérés három dimenzió mentén ragadható meg: a reziliencia és alkalmazkodás fogalmához, az életmódválasztás diskurzusához, valamint az ellenállás kérdéséhez való viszonyon keresztül.

Reziliencia helyett a terhelés csökkentése mint válasz

A késő modern társadalmakban a strukturális feszültségekre adott válaszok domináns értelmezési kerete a reziliencia és az alkalmazkodás fogalmai köré szerveződik (Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1999). Ebben a perspektívában a problémák kezelése az egyéni kapacitások fejlesztésén, az affektív önszabályozáson és a rugalmas működésen keresztül valósul meg.

Az elemzett eset azonban egy ettől eltérő logikát mutat meg. A cselekvés nem arra irányul, hogy az egyén jobban „bírja” a terhelést, hanem arra, hogy csökkentse azt. A túlterheltség ebben az értelemben nem pusztán egyéni kapacitáshiányként, hanem a diszpozíciók és a társadalmi környezet közötti strukturális inkompatibilitásként válik értelmezhetővé.

A környezeti megküzdés fogalma így implicit kritikát fogalmaz meg a reziliencia normativitásával szemben. Míg a reziliencia az egyént teszi felelőssé a strukturális feltételekhez való alkalmazkodásért (Cruikshank, 1999; Brown, 2015), addig a környezeti megküzdés az expozíció feltételeinek újraszabályozására helyezi a hangsúlyt. A cselekvés így nem a rendszerben való hatékonyabb működésre, hanem annak hatásainak korlátozására irányul.

Életmód helyett identitás- és környezetrendezés

A bemutatott gyakorlatok első pillantásra értelmezhetők lennének életmódválasztásként vagy preferenciaként. Az ilyen olvasat azonban alulértelmezné a jelenség jelentőségét.

Az elemzés alapján amellet érvelek, hogy bár a digitális detoxról, a downshiftingről, vagy éppen az önkéntes egyszerűségről szóló szakirodalom a visszavonulás késő modern kulturális kontextusát láthatóvá teszi, az elemzett esetben nem pusztán életmódbeli preferenciáról, hanem a diszpozíciós súrlódás gyakorlati kezeléséről van szó.

Ezek a gyakorlatok nem elszigetelt döntések, hanem egy koherens cselekvési logika részei, amelyek a diszpozíciós konfiguráció (Lahire, 2011) és a társadalmi környezet közötti feszültségekre adott válaszként értelmezhetők. A természethez való orientáció, a mediált kapcsolatok korlátozása és az önellátás irányába való elmozdulás fokozatosan kialakíthatják az inkompatibilitás gyakorlati kezelési formáit.

Ebben az értelemben a „visszavonulás” során, mint aktív életvilág újrendezési forma, az egyén nem „életstílust vált”, hanem újraszervezi azt a környezetet, amelyben

működik. A cselekvés így egyszerre érinti az identitás szerveződését és a mindennapi élet materiális és társas feltételeit.

Explicit ellenállás helyett a részvétel korlátozása

A kivonódás²¹ ebben az értelemben a mindennapi ellenállás egy sajátos formájaként jelenik meg, ahol az ellenállás nem explicit, kollektív vagy politikailag artikulált cselekvés.

Az elemzett esetben a cselekvés nem a rendszer megváltoztatására irányul, hanem a részvételre, vagyis, ahogyan az egyén korlátozza a rendszerhez való kapcsolódás intenzitását. A mediált kapcsolatok csökkentése, az ingerterhelés minimalizálása és a természetközeli élet felé való elmozdulás nem konfrontatív gyakorlatok, mégis a domináns működésmódoktól való eltérést jelzik.

Ebben az értelemben az ellenállás az nem szándék vagy deklaráció kérdése, hanem analitikus kategória: olyan cselekvési formák megnevezése, amelyek a részvétel feltételeinek korlátozásán keresztül újrarendezik az egyén és a társadalmi környezet viszonyát. A visszavonulás így a cselekvés sajátos formájaként válik értelmezhetővé (vö. Scott, 1985; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

Összegzés: a cselekvés alternatív logikája

A fenti három dimenzió egy közös elméleti állítás felé mutat. Az elemzett eset alapján a késő modern társadalmakban a cselekvés az alkalmazkodás, a reziliencia és az önoptimalizálás logikája mellett az expozíció feltételeinek reflexív újraszabályozásaként is értelmezhető. A tanulmány által bevezetett környezeti megküzdés fogalma ebben az értelemben azt jelöli, hogy a cselekvés az egyéni kapacitások mobilizálása helyett annak szabályozásán keresztül szerveződik, hogy az egyén milyen intenzitású és minőségű társadalmi, technológiai, érzéki és kapcsolati terhelésnek teszi ki magát. A cselekvés így az expozíció szintjén válik megragadhatóvá.

Ez a megközelítés összekapcsolható a késő modernitás kritikai elméleteivel. Egyrészt rezonál a rezonanciaelméleti megközelítésekkel, amennyiben a cselekvés a nem-rezonáns viszonyok csökkentésére és a közvetlenebb kapcsolódási formák keresésére

²¹ A visszavonulás fogalma Merton klasszikus anómiaelméletének „retreatism” kategóriáját is felidézheti, a jelen elemzés azonban ettől eltérő értelemben használja a kivonódás fogalmát. Míg Mertonnál a visszahúzódás az intézményes célok és eszközök elutasításához kapcsolódik, addig az itt vizsgált esetben a részvétel intenzitásának és feltételeinek szelektív újraszabályozásáról van szó (Merton, 1938).

irányul (Rosa, 2013). Másrészt a kormányozhatóság perspektívájából ambivalens jelenségként értelmezhető: egyszerre jelenik meg az önkormányzás egy formájaként és a késő modern önmenedzselő szubjektum implicit kritikájaként (Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1999; Han, 2015; Han, 2017).

A tanulmány hozzájárulása ebben az értelemben kettős. Egyrészt rámutat arra, hogy a késő modern társadalmakban a cselekvés túlmutathat az alkalmazkodás és az ellenállás dichotómiáján. Másrészt bevezeti a környezeti megküzdés analitikus fogalmát, amely lehetővé teszi az expozíció szintjén szerveződő cselekvési formák vizsgálatát. A cselekvés így a szubjektum belső kapacitásai mellett az egyén és a világ viszonyának aktív újrendezéseként válik értelmezhetővé.

Az eset értelmezése ugyanakkor szorosan kapcsolódik azokhoz a társadalmi feltételekhez, amelyek a szakmai útkeresést és az életmódbeli újraszervezést egyáltalán lehetővé teszik. Az ilyen típusú megküzdési stratégiák társadalmilag egyenlőtlenül hozzáférhetők, és összefüggnek az egyén erőforrásaival és társadalmi pozíciójával. Emmi középosztálybeli háttere bizonyos mozgásteret biztosít, ugyanakkor narratívája nem egyértelműen privilegizált, anyagi biztonságra épülő pozícióként rajzolódik ki. Inkább olyan ambivalens élethelyzetként, amelyben a választás lehetősége és a sérülékenység egyszerre van jelen.

Mindezek alapján a tanulmány tétje az, hogy láthatóvá tegye a cselekvés egy kevésbé hangsúlyos formáját. A késő modern túlterheltségre adott válasz nem mindig az egyéni kapacitások növelése, a rugalmasabb alkalmazkodás vagy az önoptimalizálás. Megjelenhet annak újraszabályozásaként is, hogy az egyén milyen társadalmi, technológiai, érzéki és kapcsolati hatásoknak teszi ki magát. Ebben az értelemben a környezeti megküzdés a társadalmi részvétel csendes, mindennapi újrendezését jelenti.

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