

Abstracts for Panel 7: Uneven meanings of care in an authoritarian context

Conveners

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Panel abstract

Care is an established topic in social sciences, but only recently did the scholars' attention turn to the impact of non-democratic settings on local discourses and practices of "caring". This panel explores uneven meanings and consequences/effects/implications of care in an authoritarian society. Which role can notions of care play in political claims? How can care not only amplify but also substitute mobilization? Can care practices within the solidarity process reinforce inequality and/or undermine resistance or dissent long-term? What do we see if we look retrospectively at care practices that emerge as a response to crises? What are the implications of care that emerges as a personal response to complicity, guilt, and helplessness in a wider social context? What is the role of therapeutic forms of care and therapeutic media discourse?

The panel invites papers engaging with the topic of care in authoritarian societies, focused on care practices and discourses, as well as their relationships with wider societal contexts.

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Abstract: Adelaida Caballero

Adelaida Caballero

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Paper title: “If I can care for him, can’t they care for him?” Contestatory attitudes toward state-sanctioned ‘African-proper’ eldercare among elderly women street vendors in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Abstract:

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea is the world’s longest currently serving president. His forty-three year-long administration has fractured the state over ethnic, geographical, and family lines. Aware of such fragmentation, the ruling elite tries to foster a sense of national unity through the mobilization of anti-West, radical nationalist discourses. One of such discourses is *la tradición*, a notion that alludes to a certain authentic Afro-Bantu way of life that needs to be restored in order to free the nation from polluting Western values or “imported ideas.” My paper explores how assumptions that stem from *la tradición* affect local practices of eldercare. It examines the tension between state-sanctioned ‘African-proper’ ways of caring for one’s elders and the contestatory attitudes that elderly women street vendors exhibit in relation to care expectations and demands as their relatives posit them. Based on fourteen months of fieldwork in Malabo, the Equatoguinean capital, my paper suggests that as ‘African-proper’ forms of care build on the normative performance of customary gender roles that elderly women street vendors have grown to consider unfair and/or exploitative, the vendors’ attitudes toward care-related issues reflect a more encompassing rejection of tribalist patriarchy and authoritarianism as it operates discursively through *la tradición*.

Abstract: Helle Rydstrom

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Paper title: Practicing a Feminized Ethics of Care: Labor and Welfare in Vietnam’s Industrial Zones

Abstract

Focusing on the welfare challenges and crises encountered by women in contemporary Vietnam, this paper examines the gendering of morality and the ways in which a feminized ethics of care is entangled with women’s practicing of the social capacity *tình cảm* (sentiments/feelings/emotions). Shaped as an essentializing and morality-defined female quality, *tình cảm* is both imposing pressure upon girls and women while also facilitating the building of social resilience thanks to which a landscape of gender-specific care responsibilities can be navigated in a patrilineally organized hierarchical society. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Industrial Zones of northern Vietnam, the paper highlights the ways in which welfare in a socialist market economy relies on the virtues associated with good female morality. A privatized welfare system operating in tandem with fee-based public services means that those of few financial resources are rendered precarious and encounter a variety of care challenges and crises. Some of these crises may even transmute into an underpinning and painful

reality of the ordinary. An inadequate public welfare sector, the paper shows, capitalizes on a feminized ethics of care persistently provided by women for close kin and distant relatives in need of daily support.

[Abstract: Yana Sanko](#)

Yana Sanko
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Paper title: Call HR, we have a person crying. Corporate care and inequality during the 2020 uprising in Belarus.

Abstract:

Many Belarusian Tech companies employees actively participated in anti-Lukashenka protests in the summer of 2020 and experienced arrests, beating, torture, and threats. Predominantly female human resources workers found themselves involved in caring for those employees. I discuss strategies human resources professionals utilized to respond to the crisis and to make sense of it. To navigate numerous challenges, they draw from discourses of morality, solidarity, psychotherapy, and human rights, on top of the vocabularies of transnational business compliance policies and business pragmatics. I am arguing that caring for those employees temporarily became a part of corporate perks while utilizing solidarity and morality discourses was essential for ensuring the effectiveness of the emotional labor involved. While making the organizations look more caring, those care practices could be exacerbating inequality long term.

[Abstract: Sustarum Thammaboosadee](#)

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Paper title: Care Workers- Invisible Workers : A Case study of Precariat in Thailand

Abstract:

In Thailand, the informal care sector is a large and rapidly growing sector of the economy. Care is one of the internal dimensions that many studies focus on, instead of looking at how it impacts on external dimensions such as finance, governance and political power. The lack of attention to informal care workers in policy-making has led to a wide gap between how they are treated by government institutions, and their actual needs: namely social protection policies aimed at marginalized groups.

The problem of precariousness still exists in Thailand, as in many other countries. It is defined as the condition where people are insecure, both financially and otherwise, due to inadequate levels of security to meet the needs of protection against dangers and opportunities. This situation has affected many families that make many children either return home after school or work late at night with their parents who suffer from dementia and other age-related diseases.

The presentation will be separated in three parts 1. How Authoritarian society in Thailand normalize the precarious workers in Thailand 2. The working condition of care workers in Thailand 3. The brief solution for precarity working conditions of care workers in Thailand.

[Abstract: Roman Urbanowicz](#)

Roman Urbanowicz

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University of Helsinki, PhD student

Paper title: Care, control, and ethics of catastrophes: moral economies of state-controlled labour in Belarusian revolution of 2020

Abstract:

In August 2020, as the protests against rigged elections in Belarus were suppressed with unprecedented police violence, streets of cities and towns were flooded by peaceful demonstrations calling to stop the brutality. While the police first retreated from the streets under the pressure of nationwide indignation, the state has later recuperated, returning to violent suppression of demonstrations by early September and launching systemic repressions on other fronts, such as through pressure put on the state-employed labour force. Control over the latter, heavily atomised, de-unionised and, forced into precarious contracts is one of the fundamental means of authoritarian subjugation, and it is particularly efficient in the countryside, where private employments are scarce.

In my presentation, I analyse events that took place in the town of Ostoja, where I did my ethnographic research in August 2019 – September 2020. While differing in scale, mass demonstrations against police violence took place there as well, and so came the state's countermeasures. Specifically, I analyse the conflict that ensued in the local school, where its headmaster threatened the school staff that partook in protests with layoffs to ensure their future passivity. I address the use of the notions of care and ethical obligations, used by either party to advocate for either political compliance or a pressing need to rebel against the moral catastrophe.

Scrutinising these issues, I engage with the anthropological debates on care, ethics, and political mobilisation, striving to untangle the imbrications of those diverse forces in a rural authoritarian setting, addressing how diversely positioned ethics shape the role of care in the ways people in such settings either rebel or opt not to.

[Abstract: Andrei Vazymanau](#)

Andrei Vazymanau

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Paper title: Psychologization of Care As a Popular Response to Mass Repressions in Belarus

Abstract:

The paper aims to analyze the unfolding of therapeutic discourse in an authoritarian society after a brutal suppression of a protest wave. Although a number of texts have focused on the role of emotions in the dynamics of political mobilization, their focus has been predominantly on the initial stages of

protest in democratic or partly free societies. I am analyzing the case of 2020-2021 anti-police violence protests in Belarus, where the revolt didn't achieve its goals and vocal criticism became fairly risky, but the level of societal discontent remained high.

In Belarusian media space, care of one's self and others was mentioned often since the very start of the protest (Stebur, Talstou 2020). Shparaga (2021) mentioned the triad of resistance, care, and patience to characterize the coping strategies of the anti-violence community during the mass repressions. Drawing on mass media publications, comments on social media platforms, and ethnographic listening in Minsk, the presentation traces how the discursive use of care as a key notion shifted from going out on the streets to coping with trauma. Particularly, I trace how the discussion of riot police violence is reframed so that the topic relocates from the political field into the sphere of experience management. The case thus demonstrates that of different paths towards the state where collective knowledge is treated as an individual neurotic disorder one might run via the vocabulary of care.