

*Yemen on the move: Ethnography of journeys through war and borders*

Yemen is recognized as the site of the world's worst humanitarian crisis, but scant attention has been paid to the Yemeni lives affected by the war, and to the perilous migratory journeys on which many Yemenis have embarked in search of better futures. The scarcity of academic research on the Yemeni crisis privileges the lens of geopolitics, in which ordinary people are absent or flattened to speechless victims. Against these erasures of 'unsung heroes' and their undocumented struggles, my project centers Yemenis' battles for survival and mobility. At its core, my project is animated by an interest in tracing and understanding Yemenis' itineraries of war and migration. To that effect, I propose a longitudinal, ethnographic engagement with Yemenis *on the move*- those who have fled the country and seek better lives in Europe and beyond. By reconstructing their transnational journeys, my project's objective is to go beyond the dominant focus on refugees' vulnerabilities, and to center instead Yemenis' agency and mobility struggles. As such, my project aims to tell a story of the excessive violence of war and immigration regimes, but also a story of people's endurance, resilience and complex motivations.

Migratory movements tend to be understood as a straightforward, unidirectional passage from a country of origin to a country of destination. In contrast, my project will illuminate trajectories that are global, extended in time and non-linear. Simply to leave the country, Yemenis have to traverse through warzones of battlegrounds, airstrikes, and checkpoints. Their journeys take them through many countries and a multiplicity of transit points: from seas, deserts and mountain ranges, to airports and train stations, refugee camps and police stations, not to mention the streets, parks and forests, where Yemenis on the move often sleep, rest and hide. Although western-European countries are typically their intended destinations, many Yemenis never reach the Global North. For others, large sections of their migratory journeys are located outside the European Union. From the vantage point of the spatial and individual trajectories, my research aims to understand how the violence of war and borders is lived, experienced and interpreted, but also how it is navigated and defied. Thus, departing from dominant depictions of migrants as either passive victims or criminalized subjects, my project asks how Yemenis who leave their homeland enact agency on the route. How do they negotiate and circumvent the complex institutional forces that hinder their mobility? What ties of solidarity, friendship and care are forged on their perilous ways, but also what connections do they retain with the loved ones left behind?

Relying on multi-sited and mobile ethnography, my project will follow Yemeni migrants and document their journeys from the Global South to Global North, but also across the Global South and Europe. I will conduct grounded fieldwork in various locations through which Yemenis pass and where they try to settle (such as Malaysia, Turkey and Egypt, Germany and Holland). I will also conduct fieldwork on the move (for example across the Balkan route) following the itineraries of my key interlocutors to account for different stages of their journeys. Considering Yemenis as story-tellers of their own paths and plights, my research will rely on participant observation, open-ended and semi-structured interviews, and digital communication. These methods will enable me to register how Yemenis experience, understand and articulate their lives on the move and their lives before displacement.

The focus on the individual trajectories and transnational journeys sets my work apart from much of the scholarship on migration, characterized by 'methodological nationalism' and a sedentary bias. By following Yemenis' footsteps, I will open new avenues of theorizing the iterations of people's mobility and agency in relation to racialized violence and control. Relying on mobile methods and an original framework that centers migrants' lifeworlds, routes and knowledge systems my project breaks new ground by widening our gaze - analytically towards the totality of the migratory experience, and geographically, beyond Europe. Providing the first grounded account of the Yemeni war and displacement, my work will enrich our understanding of the unexplored subject, and it will contribute to the fields of cultural and political anthropology, migration studies and political ethnography.

This project expands on my previous research conducted in Yemen between 2008 and 2014, and builds on my preliminary field research with Yemeni migrants conducted in Greece in summer 2019.