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**TITOLO/TITLE: Constructing Constant Crisis: Research Methodologies as Filtering Mechanisms**

**PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s:** Odetta Pizzingrilli (Università LUISS Guido Carli); Irene Tuzi (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin); Patricia Ward (Technische Universität Dresden)

**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):**

Social science increasingly represents a significant market and industry in the West Asia-North Africa region (WANA). The number of researchers in the region has proliferated, particularly over the past two decades. Increasing demand for data has expanded and created new labor markets for consultants, translators, 'brokers' and 'fixers' in turn, and conducting interviews and surveys became a marketable skill. Competition for research-related jobs has also increased, framed as 'desirable' employment and experience opportunities. However, in spite of the always increasing interest, reductionist accounts of the region in constant 'chaos' and crisis persist, and researchers often continue to delineate social dynamics in the region to a narrow scope of topics (e.g., refugees, authoritarianism, humanitarianism, oil) (Pascucci, 2017; Teti, 2009). What explains this mismatch? Why, in fact, might we even see an increased production of reductionist and ahistorical accounts of social phenomena related to the region?

Markets for research embed, and are often already embedded in, notions of WANA as 'chaotic', 'problematic', and 'static' in its design and structure (Hanafi, 2020). Such assumptions subsequently shape the scope of research in terms of topics, phenomena of interest and data collection. Moreover, the act and governance of data collection are informed and intertwined with multiple state and non-state actors' interests that shape understandings of 'best research practices' that in turn often reify and reproduce colonial and imperial hierarchies, and exceed the interests and power of individual researchers (Deeb & Winegar, 2015; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019). Post-colonial feminist scholars (Haraway, 1988) have long emphasized the latter, and how claims of methodological objectivity obscure the power relations undergirding and embedded in the knowledge production process. Knowledge produced by the dominant group is needed to reproduce their worldview, while knowledge produced by marginalized groups is always 'outsider knowledge': the indigenous space becomes the 'outside', in "an oppositional relation to the colonial center" (Smith, 1999).

This panel draws upon this scholarship to subsequently consider how social science methodologies as 'best practice' contribute and produce these hierarchies in ways not always anticipated. That is, how do methodological epistemologies and their articulations in day-to-day practices shape how researchers depict social phenomena and relations in the WANA

region accordingly. Social science research techniques are often uncritically seen as 'objectively' representing the experiences and the perspectives of the 'researched communities' albeit acknowledgement that methodology is a cultural product (Gobo, 2011), and that meanings associated with social phenomena are relational and vary in different contexts as well (e.g., concepts of time and space). This panel considers the potential of 'filtering' as a concept that can be mobilized to systematically account for the various mechanisms embedded in social science methodology that clarify, but also obscure, articulations and understandings of social relations and power.

When we think of the term filter or filtering, definitions often focus on physical material "passing through a device to remove unwanted material". However, filtering also distorts, and leaves one with only a partial 'picture' of the original product. This distortion may also occur because filtering *organizes, sorts* and *directs* materials and information (e.g., radio and cell phone bandwidths). In this case, nothing might be missing from the original product, but the elements are reorganized in particular patterns, or directed to particular populations versus others (Britannica, 2021).

This panel extends this notion of filtering to social science methodologies by focusing on the following key-elements:

- The research tools that shape explanations and narratives about the region (e.g., Studying the social through independent-dependent variable frameworks, data collection techniques) between the risk of reductionism and the burden of exceptionalism;
- The role of language (verbal, written) as both a tool of research and a way of organizing and transferring ideas in particular ways and to particular audiences, in turn classifying information as 'valuable' and 'relevant' (Almaghlouth et al, 2015; Savci, 2016);
- Positionality: How researchers and participants' various and diverging cultural and social group statuses shape the research process (Bourke, 2014)? What is the role of personalities and relationships in 'filtering' our understanding of the field? How can we manage intersectional differences (e.g., gender, race, nationality, age, class, etc.) in the interaction with research participants?
- The presumed objectivity of Western-born social sciences and its colonial effects: How can we, for example, use filtering as a concept and instrument to 'decolonize' the social science episteme (Smith, 1999; Connell, 2007) including its methodological basis? How can the 'interview society' (Silverman, 1993; Gobo, 2011) be reconsidered and analyzed to counter methodological colonialism (Alatas, 2003)? What are the limits of Western qualitative methodologies used in non-Western contexts?

This panel welcomes submissions that seek to unpack these questions theoretically and/or empirically, as well as submissions that expand on this basis and introduce new ideas related to methodologies and mechanisms of filtering from a critical perspective.

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## PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

**Odetta Pizzingrilli** is a Research Fellow in History of Islamic Countries at the Department of Political Science at LUISS Guido Carli University in Rome and Adjunct Professor of Arabic Culture and Literature at the Humanities Department of the University of Macerata and of Arabic Language at the Political Sciences Department of Federico II University (Naples). Her research focuses on nation/state building-process of the Arab states, national identity formation, minorities and minoritization processes. She gained research experiences in Syria, Jordan and Kuwait while working at her PhD project “State and Legitimacy within an Arab-Muslim context. Understanding the identity criteria in Jordan and Kuwait”. Among her publications: Pizzingrilli, O. “Circassians: An Identity in Exile. The Case of Jordan, a Minority at the Royal Palace”, 159-186. *Studi Magrebini*, XVI:2018. (02/2019); Pizzingrilli, O. “Transnational identity and Circassians in Contemporary Jordan (1991-2018)” in Maggiolini, P. & Ouahes, I. (ed.) *Minorities and State-Building in the Middle East: The Case of Jordan*. Palgrave Mcmillan, London (2020); Pizzingrilli, O. Translation of the novel *Shajarat al-bu's* (1944) by Taha Husayn, Istituto per l'Oriente Carlo Alfonso Nallino (2021).

**Irene Tuzi** is a sociologist of migration with particular expertise in ethnography, refugee studies, gender studies and the Middle East. She holds a double PhD in Social Sciences from Sapienza University of Rome and Humboldt University of Berlin (2021). She has been a visiting researcher at the Institute for Migration Studies and the Lebanese American University (2016-2019) and the Institute of Mediterranean Europe History at the Italian National Research Council (2015). She is currently a visiting researcher at MERGE Network and a lecturer at Humboldt University, Department of Social Sciences, where she teaches qualitative methodologies. Her PhD dissertation, titled “Renegotiating Gender Roles and Relationships in Displacement: Syrian Families in Lebanon and Germany”, used *agency* as a lens to analyze gender relations in forced migration.

**Patricia Ward** is a postdoctoral research associate at the Center for Integration Studies at the Technische Universität Dresden. Her research interests are in the areas of transnational labor, migration/mobility, and humanitarian aid and development. Patricia was previously with the Department of Ethics, Law and Politics at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, and obtained her doctorate from Boston University in 2020. Her dissertation, “How Humanitarian Relief ‘Works’: International Aid Organizations and Local Labor in Crisis Contexts” examined the reorganization of aid operations amidst a growing number of protracted displacement crises worldwide. She specifically focused on how these shifts affected national aid workers employed in the sector in Jordan as a major global aid hub.

**INDIRIZZO/I EMAIL/EMAIL ADDRESSES:**

**Odetta Pizzingrilli:** [odettapizzingrilli@gmail.com](mailto:odettapizzingrilli@gmail.com)

**Irene Tuzi:** [irene.tuzi@hu-berlin.de](mailto:irene.tuzi@hu-berlin.de); [ire.tuzi@gmail.com](mailto:ire.tuzi@gmail.com);

**Patricia Ward:** [patricia.ward@tu-dresden.de](mailto:patricia.ward@tu-dresden.de)