

ISA ONLINE GUEST LECTURE

EXEMPLARY ETHICS IN EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

REFLECTIONS ON REVOLUTIONARY LIFE IN YEMEN'S CHANGE SQUARE

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Prevailing narratives of revolution are marred by fatalism. The revolutionary individual, forever chasing an evasive future, is the tragic hero destined to suffer in the rubble of their ideals. On the tenth anniversary of the Peaceful Popular Youth Revolution in Yemen, this lecture will return to the initial moments of this event to tell its story on its own terms. Based on fieldwork in the revolutionary camp of Change Square, I argue that this event was upheld not only as a means to an end but as an end in itself. From non-violent action to egalitarian logics of assembly and self-governance, change was celebrated as immanent to the revolutionary present and something to uphold, preserve and defend. I will discuss how this exemplary ethics manifests in revolutionary life as an unprecedented capacity to act upon ones values. Taking this capacity seriously, I propose, demands that we move beyond certain instrumentalist and teleological conventions that govern prevalent understandings of ethical action. I will end by reflecting on some of the enduring consequences of early revolutionary life in the context of the current war.



Ross Porter is lecturer in anthropology at the Institute of Arab and Middle East Studies at the University of Exeter. He is primarily interested in questions of time, ethics and freedom, stemming from his ethnographic fieldwork in a revolutionary community in Yemen. He is currently working on a monograph of the Yemeni Revolution.

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