Beyond oppositional narratives: the potential of creativity to destabilize the ‘coherent’ subject of resistance.

This presentation begins from the observation that many accounts of resistance within asylum systems pivot upon a coherent subject, imbued with political agency and posited as oppositional to particular configurations of sovereign power. Drawing upon research undertaken with charity Music in Detention, within a UK Immigration Removal Centre, I demonstrate the potential of creative activities to break down such binaries and to foster other genres of being with others. To this end, I examine interactions between officers and detainees, studying moments facilitated by creative activities where the apparent distinction between resistance and compliance becomes blurred: the shared laughter, jokes and encounters between detainees and officers; the joy a detainee’s release; the irreducible multiplicity of a migrant officer’s life. I explore these entangled moments to show that accounts that insist upon the stability of the oppositional subject when theorizing resistance serve to delineate the political a priori. I argue that it is important to endure these contradictions rather than to write them out of politics as an attention to ambiguities, excesses and paradoxes make alternatives possible; to transcend essentialising categories is to be open to other ways to live with others, otherwise.

The Geography Research Unit Colloquium Series is an open forum for students and researchers to meet, discuss, present and develop common interests in research. All are welcome.