

## **Exiled Survivor's guilt and activism: the case of Syrian civil society activists in Berlin**

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This presentation is part of a broader research focused on the experiences and trajectories of Syrian civil society activists who were involved in the popular uprising of 2011 and have recently become transnational activists abroad, being exiled in Berlin. By comparing their experiences at home and abroad through open-ended interviews, complemented by participant observation, I explore the type of activities they carry out, their sources of motivation to engage in high-risk activism, and how the trauma and experience of war and exile has shaped them. This research shows how survivor's guilt and the baggage of their own traumatic experiences are a motivation to keep a high level of activism once abroad. Activism "brings back a sense of identity", of pride, in a strange land where otherwise they are "just refugees". It becomes a source of positive feelings, a relief's valve for one's anger, and a reconnection with their origin. They are united in a common idealism about a revolution that could not be, one that has become "a revolution of the mind". Yet the inability to meaningfully contribute to ease the pain of their home country through their actions, or to advance the initial ideals of political change, feeds again the guilt and frustration. Activism is a source of pride and relief as it is of frustration and exhaustion. Regardless, Syrian exiled activists do not perceive they have the option to choose, they can only "keep going", "keep trying something new".