



SWEDISH
COLLEGIUM
for ADVANCED STUDY

REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

Session: Connecting Visual Sociology and Visual Geography I: Collecting, Producing and Analyzing Visual Data

Session Convener(s): Dennis Zuev, CIES-ISCTE, Lisbon

Chair: Dennis Zuev, CIES-ISCTE, Lisbon

Comments: This session is organized by ISA TG 05

I) *Participatory Photography as a Complimentary Research Tool with Vulnerable Groups*
Marlize Rabe, University of South Africa

II) *Humanitarian Discourse: The Visual Construction of Human Suffering*
Pierluigi Musaro, University of Bologna and New York University

III) *Qualitative Analysis of the Ultranationalist Self-presentations in YouTube: Comparing Visual Stories of Uyghur and Chechen Separatists*
Matteo Vergani, Catholic University of Milan

ABSTRACTS

Session description

This section is dedicated to a discussion concerning visual data collected and/or produced in the field, and an elaboration on the relevant methods of analysis. Some of the questions that could be addressed are: What is the added value of visual methods to the sociological research? What kind of opportunities and obstacles are involved in a visually-centered method? What are important structural elements of the visual that help to analyze cultural differences and make intercultural comparisons of visual conventions and visual codes?

Papers

I) *Participatory Photography as a Complimentary Research Tool with Vulnerable Groups*

Marlize Rabe, University of South Africa

This paper reflects on a research project on refugees living in the Pretoria central areas (the capital city of South Africa), and considers the role of participatory photography in overcoming divisions between researchers and research participants. During a research project in 2009/2010 a mixed-method approach was employed, which included exploratory group interviews, in-depth interviews by an interpreter/fieldworker and participatory photography with ten female refugees. In this project, “outsiders” (middle class South African academics) undertook research on “others” (refugees from the DRC and Burundi), and factors such as material inequality, racial differences, differences in nationality and no shared language contributed to the division between the researchers and the research participants. Certain researchers suggest that in such situations, where the life worlds of research participants and the researchers are so divided, the topics are best left to researchers who can be considered more “insiders”. I argued against such a singular view before by showing how the outsider can yield different results, and may even access information that remains hidden to an insider (Rabe 2003). *Both* researchers as outsiders and insiders can add value to research topics, especially when the fluidity of the insider/outsider status is taken into consideration. In reflecting on the research process, the role of visual images in attempting to overcome the divisions between researchers and research participants is under scrutiny. It will be argued that results were obtained that had not been anticipated or initially considered almost worthless, yet, unexpected insight in the life worlds of refugees has been gained.

II) *Humanitarian Discourse: The Visual Construction of Human Suffering*

Pierluigi Musaro, University of Bologna and New York University

Within the growing literature in the political economy of humanitarianism, this paper focuses on ethical dilemmas raised by increased marketization. The aim of this article is to investigate the paradoxical relationship between humanitarianism as a project and the construction of an “emergency imaginary”, focusing on the ways in which aid agencies produce and disseminate images of human suffering. This article will first explore how the growth of humanitarianism in the last decades has been strongly correlated with the expanded use of image-based fundraising and awareness-raising campaigns. The focus will then examine the relationship between these images and the forging of “emergencies” aimed at persuading the audience to donate to aid projects. Finally, it will analyze how the humanitarian discourse shaped by fundraising appeals is playing an important role in shifting our attention from development to emergency assistance, as well as in establishing a moral geography of the world. Indeed, humanitarian aid rhetoric often portrays the wealthy global North as the “supranatural” performer of a civilizing mission in the underdeveloped South.

III) *Qualitative Analysis of the Ultranationalist Self-presentations in YouTube: Comparing Visual Stories of Uyghur and Chechen Separatists*

Matteo Vergani, Catholic University of Milan

In this essay we examine two narratives related to separatist movements in Chechnya and Xinjiang. The purpose of the essay is to identify similarities and differences in the use of visual rhetorical techniques that extremist groups use to explain their worldview. Through visualizations produced by the websites of Chechen and Uyghurs separatists and the videos uploaded in YouTube one can explore the potential impact of the Islamic virtual public sphere on the creation of collective identities. We examine and compare two narrative lines of symbolic construction of identity related to two separatist groups which make up the global Islamic social movement. Some preliminary conclusions: The visualization frame of Chechen separatism is more based on militant Islam and the values of the Islamic society, Jihadist ideology, while in Uyghur case, militant Islam plays second role in the communicating the political message of the ethnic group. The civil-activist frame in separatist movement in Uyghur case is more elaborate and better visualized.