

## **Playing with the Archive: Staging the 1919 Uprising**

(In collaboration with the Institute for De-Colonising Theory)

This workshop is a crash course through the archive of 1919, but it is also an experiment in storytelling, acting, improvisation, and dramatization.

What happens when we treat an archival document not as a fixed retelling of facts, but as a draft of a script — open to interpretation, animated by multiple voices and shifting narrative viewpoints?

And what happens when these documents pertain to the formative moment of 1919?

What muted stories of resistance begin to emerge? What suppressed narratives can be restored through this method — and what critical insights can we gain about the archive itself, its silences, its biases, and its power to speak?

In this workshop we take a number of documents, all pertaining to the 1919 Revolution and its aftermath— a moment of mass mobilization, underground organization, protest, agitation, sabotage and all forms of peaceful and non-peaceful confrontations against the British occupation.

Taking place against heavy British censorship, the historiography pertaining to the 1919 uprising suffers from a lacuna that can only be resolved, if partially, through recourse to the colonial records, where not only the empire's reports are kept, but where also a

large mass of the local pamphlets was expropriated. Although there have been various attempts (especially in Arabic language historiography) to retell the events from the point of view of the players who decided to record their testimonies, the larger body of primary documents is only accessible through the misrepresentations of the British colonial archives. We are doomed to refer to the colonial archives to (re)tell our anticolonial histories.

But, we treat colonial fiction as fiction. Through dramatization we dig up and seek to restore the repressed voices within this archive in order to retell the story from these repressed narrative points.

Through dramatizing these documents, we seek to investigate the biases of the colonial records, interrogate the players and their aims and methods, and recover (through a mix of research and well informed speculation, embedded in the documents and the scenes they tell and guided by the theatrical method) stories of resistance. How can this method complement other methods of archival and historical research? How can 'educated guesses' in the theatrical tradition guide students, scholars, and researchers in posing critical questions and challenging colonial hegemony over historical narratives?

More specific to 1919 Egypt, we also seek to contribute to troubling the myth of a "civil" revolution bound in the urban centres starring well behaved men and women- and the

diametrically opposed myth of an uncivilized Egyptian horde engaged in irrational riots and destruction.

The aim nevertheless is not to adapt the document into a play (even though part of the exercise is to think as if we would), but to introduce dramatization as a useful classroom tool, and as a way for researchers to engage critically and creatively with primary documents

The workshop derives from the shared vision of the Institute for De-Colonising Theory (IDCtheory) and the Cairo Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CILAS) to radically democratize the intellectual arena through participatory pedagogy and collective thinking and research– in less fancy terms: to make education and research accessible, engaging, and fun.

To make a more explicit reference to the theory: the workshop is informed by Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* and Edward Said's method of contrapuntal reading. It seeks to identify and interrogate the lacunae of the archive and through the productive reading of absences to harken to and re-enact repressed and muted voices.

### **What to Expect**

Over 6 sessions, we will be looking at documents from the British National archives, about 1919, the Milner mission, anticolonial 'riots', sabotage, political agitation, and a lot more.

We will proceed to decipher the documents (restoring them from shorthand to legible English- AI assistance allowed), put them in their wider historical context and identify what they may omit or distort. We will fill these glaring gaps through a mixture of research, educated guesses, and imagination.

We will then treat these documents as draft scripts: we will narrativize, dramatize, and improvise. Expect a lot of intellectual conversation about history, representation, context, and political action, but also expect to create, act out, and move around (wear comfortable clothes).

**Ahmed Diaa Dardir** is the co-founder of the Institute for De-Colonising Theory (IDCtheory). His research deals with questions of power and subjectivity, especially in colonial/anticolonial and revolutionary /counterrevolutionary contexts. He holds a PhD in Middle East Studies from Columbia University. His forthcoming book is tentatively titled *Licentious Topographies: Global Counterrevolution and Bad Subjectivity in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt*.