

Suitcases full of meds

Suitcases full of meds: Engaged ethnography of healthcare crisis in Lebanon



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In August 2020 the Beirut port explosion blew up the northern part of the city, bringing the world's attention to Lebanon and its strained economy. Over the last three years, Lebanon's 'house of cards' economy has crumbled. As people in Lebanon try to come to terms with a new reality, the financial crisis, fuelled by years of corruption and mismanagement, brought the largely privatized healthcare system to its last legs.

Pharmaceuticals and medical supplies disappeared from the market almost overnight, kicking off a shortage crisis that continues to this day.

Scrambling for medicine, alternative ways of securing medicines emerged, as people turned to international and national NGOs working in Lebanon, traveling abroad to buy medicine, or arranging with members of the large, international Lebanese diaspora, who frequents the country for holidays and family visits. Over the summer of 2021, countless suitcases stuffed with meds flew into Lebanon illegally. Border guards and customs officers would turn a blind eye. While international organizations working in Lebanon made humanitarian arrangements to import pharmaceuticals strictly to be distributed through the newly re-invigorated system of Primary Healthcare Centers, the medicine black market quickly emerged, selling meds from Lebanon's neighboring countries - Iran, Syria, and Turkey.

It was during this time that suitcases full of Polish medicines arrived safely in Lebanon in Magdalena's luggage and we, a pair of anthropologists, entered the minefield of distributing medicines to those who are most in need. Navigating the many conundrums encountered during these interactions, this talk will present provisional fieldwork insights that explore how ethnographic engagement during crisis and collapse can, firstly, reveal the ethical compromises that people in Lebanon encounter on an everyday basis as they strive for therapeutic survival and, secondly, how the political economy of pharmaceuticals in Lebanon begins to take form through active

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engagement during fieldwork.

Bio:

Anthony Rizk, Ph.D. Candidate (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Graduate Institute of Geneva) is a Lebanese anthropologist, whose primary area of expertise is medical anthropology, particularly an ethnographic study of the healthcare crisis. A Ph.D. candidate in his fourth year, in his doctoral research, Anthony uses archives, oral history, and ethnography to study how salvage practices are embedded in everyday life as people in Lebanon live in anticipation of collapse. Anthony is conducting multi-sited fieldwork among scientists repurposing pathogens in laboratories, physicians using salvage therapies in clinics, and political activists constantly building and rebuilding social movements to study salvage as an everyday practice that cuts across microbial, human, and political life.

Adres URL źródła: <https://etnologia.uw.edu.pl/aktualnosci/suitcases-full-meds>