



Growing up in/with a diverse city: Insights from Abu Dhabi

Laure Assaf | New York University Abu Dhabi

In Abu Dhabi, the capital city of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), foreigners make up around 88 percent of the population — a result of migration flows as well as exclusionary citizenship policies that lock migrants in the status of temporary guest workers. While classical models of assimilation portray the city as a privileged place for the progressive incorporation of migrants into the host society, Abu Dhabi's context is thus one in which formal integration is impossible and the host population is itself a minority. Referencing long-term ethnographic research, this presentation explores the impact of this context on young adults who came of age in Abu Dhabi at the turn of the 21st century. By examining how UAE-born Arab expatriates and young Emiratis navigate the diverse urban environment, the presentation will shed light on the way everyday interactions and spatial segregations enforce social hierarchies, but also on how the city allows for opportunities to bypass and challenge the social order and ultimately shapes these young adults' subjectivities.