

Institution: University of Kent		
Unit of Assessment: 27: English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Rebuilding Civil Society in a Divided Middle East Through Policy Advice, Arts Activism, and Practitioner Consultancies		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Caroline Rooney	Professor of African and Middle Eastern Studies	1992-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Rooney's research by practice in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt is focused on the reconstitution of Arab civil societies through creative means. Since 2012, she has engaged in projects that effect regional trust-building and community regeneration. This has enabled her: to inform policy-making and the public on Palestine and a conflicted Middle East through a series of findings that have been taken up by NGOs and British MPs; to build communities and trust through arts activism in the context of a Middle East fractured by sectarian conflicts and authoritarian divide and rule; and to further creative arts exchanges and education through consultancies that have benefited artists and conflict-affected schoolchildren.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Rooney's research has explored the different trajectories of extremism and revolutionary radicalism in the Middle East, and has enabled her to identify the three key research areas that underlie this case study: the protraction of the Israel-Palestine conflict; trust-building in Lebanon and other post-conflict societies; and community-building through the arts in post-revolutionary Egypt. Rooney's work shows how arts activism is highly effective in establishing new kinds of participatory citizenship that answer to the demand for <i>karamah</i> (dignity) that the Arab uprisings brought to the fore. Committed to culturally informed approaches, the work draws on extensive periods of fieldwork, including interviews, workshops, and arts projects, in three countries of the MENA region.</p>		
<p>Palestine: In 2013, Rooney undertook fieldwork research in Palestine with film director Mai Masri. They interviewed former child prisoners at the Hebron YMCA and therapists working with former prisoners at the Beit Sahour YMCA, together with human rights workers. Rooney followed this fieldwork up with further research leading to her 2015 article 'Prison-Israel Palestine' [R1], which shows how the dynamics of the Israel-Palestine conflict are those of the gated community (regarding Israel) and the prison (regarding Palestine). This investigation issued in two research-by-practice projects on the predicaments of Palestinian prisoners: the play <i>The Keepers of Infinite Space</i> (2014), which Rooney instigated and pitched to the Park Theatre, London, with contributions to its script (plot design and dialogue) and production process; and the advocacy documentary <i>Breaking the Generations: Palestinian Prisoners and Medical Rights</i>, directed by Rooney with William Parry (2015) [R2].</p>		
<p>Lebanon: Following on from her previous research on the Lebanese civil war [R3], Rooney mounted a workshop in Beirut on trust-building with Lebanese journalists, psychoanalysts and activists (2013). This led to her scripting and directing (with Rita Sakr) an arts documentary, <i>White</i></p>		

Flags (2014), which portrays the different approaches to rebuilding war-torn Lebanon on the part of the film's interviewees across the areas of humanitarian aid, psychoanalysis, journalism, and the arts [R4]. The film provides counter-narratives to those of sectarianism through exploring processes of mourning and memorialisation, civil society initiatives for justice, and the role of popular culture in community-building.

Egypt: Rooney has mounted a number of research workshops in Egypt to explore local arts activism, including 'Geographies of Negligence' (Cairo University and the British Council, 2015), and co-inaugurated the Egyptian Forum for the Study of Popular Culture and a 'Living Heritage' series on music, film, art, and literature (with Fekri Hassan, French University of Egypt, 2016-17). Her research in this area has led to several articles, including [R5], and culminated in her monograph *Creative Radicalism in the Middle East* [R6], which explains the differences between radicalism and extremism in terms of different forms of popular culture and their signifying practices. This work establishes that creative radicalism is the democratic alternative to the deadlock between authoritarian neoliberalism and destructive extremism.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Rooney, Caroline (2014). 'Prison Israel-Palestine: Literalities of Criminalization and Imaginative Resistance'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50(2): 134-147.

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/54975/>

[R2] Rooney, Caroline, director (with William Parry) (2015). *Breaking the Generations: Palestinian Prisoners and Medical Rights*. Ramallah and London. Documentary film (27 minutes).

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/55135/>; <https://vimeo.com/157902498>

[R3] Rooney, Caroline (2013). 'A Question of Faith in Humanity: Jean Said Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments* and Other Beirut Fragments'. In: Caroline Rooney and Rita Sakr (eds), *The Ethics of Representation in Literature, Art and Journalism*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 98-118.

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/40185/>

[R4] Rooney, Caroline, director (with Rita Sakr) (2014). *White Flags*. Beirut and London. Documentary film (46 minutes). <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/55136/>; <https://youtu.be/KjmmGN9a88E>

[R5] Rooney, Caroline (2015). 'Islamism, Capitalism and Mimetic Desire in the Terrorism Novel'. In: Abir Hamdar and Lindsey Moore (eds), *Islamism and Cultural Expression in the Arab World*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 168-85. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/54986/>

[R6] Rooney, Caroline (2020). *Creative Radicalism in the Middle East: Culture and the Arab Left After the Uprisings*. London: Bloomsbury/I. B. Tauris. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/86676/>

Grants

[G1] Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellowship (2012-16). 'Imagining the Common Ground: Utopian Thinking and the Overcoming of Resentment and Distrust'. AHRC-ESRC. PI: Caroline Rooney. Value: £422,713.58.

[G2] ESRC Uplift Funding (2013). PI: Caroline Rooney. Value: £50,000.

[G3] AHRC Newton-Mosharafa Grant (2016-17). 'Egypt's Living Heritage: Community Engagement in Recreating the Past.' UK PI: Caroline Rooney. Egypt PI: Mostafa Gadd. Value of UK contribution: £31,273.00.

[G4] ESRC TNOF Fellowship (2019-21). 'The Crime-Terror Nexus from Below: Criminal and Extremist Practices, Networks and Narratives in Deprived Neighbourhoods of Tripoli.' PI: Raphaël Lefèvre. Co-I: Caroline Rooney. Value: £365,476.

4. Details of the impact

Informing Policy-Making and the Public on Palestine and a Conflicted Middle East

Rooney's research is frequently used by policy-makers and parliamentarians for insights into radicalism and extremism in the Middle East. This has led to Rooney informing policy advice in a range of areas, including cultural soft power, religious literacy, and human rights. Examples during the REF2021 period include the evidence Rooney provided in 2014 to the House of Lords select

committee on 'Soft Power and the UK's Influence' (with the ensuing policy report quoting her research); the policy briefing on religious literacy mounted by John Wolfe and launched by Salisbury MP John Glen and Lapido Media in **2015**, to which Rooney contributed material, and which has raised journalists' awareness of how to discuss religious difference in reporting political events; and her regular participation between **2014** and **2016** in the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Global Uncertainties, which included, for example, breakfast meetings on 'Europe's role on bringing peace to the Middle East', 'Security, religion and radicalisation', and 'Terrorist propaganda and social media'. In **2015**, Rooney's role on this AAPG led to the Head of the Home Office's counter-radicalisation unit to set up a private meeting (under Chatham House rules) to discuss follow-on implications from Rooney's work on counter-narratives [a].

The most sustained impact of Rooney's research on policy-makers and the public has been in matters concerning Palestine. In the Palestinian case, impact entails generating public and policy support for the peace process and for Palestinian rights in the face of powerful lobbies, mainstream media, and Western governments that unilaterally support the Israeli government's position. Rooney has accordingly worked with activists (Palestinian and Israeli) to thwart the censorship of Palestinian concerns. Activist Ghada Karimi confirms that Rooney 'has been especially successful at engaging audiences over the importance of persisting with a valid Israeli-Palestinian peace process' [b].

In **2014**, Rooney co-produced her play *The Keepers of Infinite Space* for a nearly sold-out three-week run at the Park Theatre in London, including three platform debates about issues raised in the play, such as cultural resistance, the prison system, and human rights. Reviewers noted the effect of the play on its audiences: 'it is necessary and bold political theatre, and it will have you thinking for days' (Everything Theatre); this play 'takes an iron grip on you' (WhatsOnStage); 'This is very much for people who want to see theatre exploring important issues whilst helping to illuminate' (*Time Out*). Al Jazeera featured the production in a news interview to make the point that British theatre could present a humanising view of Palestinian prisoners, thus correcting the international perception of a British lack of concern [c].

In **2015**, Rooney collaborated with William Parry, then with the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians, to co-direct *Breaking the Generations* [R2], which is based on Rooney's research into the violation of the medical rights of Palestinian prisoners. The film had a range of public screenings in **2016** and **2017** (e.g., at the 2016 Toronto Palestine Film Festival; at the 2017 Medact Health Through Peace Conference; and at events organised by both Palestinian and Israeli NGOs, including Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association; the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel; and Physicians for Human Rights Israel). In **2018**, the film was shortlisted for the AHRC Medical Humanities Medal; in **2021**, Ken Loach approached co-director William Parry about the possibility of future screenings of the film.

The film has been used to raise awareness among UK parliamentarians for the cause of Palestinian human rights. Rooney chaired a session after a screening of the film at the Holyrood parliament on **9 December 2015**, organised by Philippa Whitford, then MP for Central Ayrshire, to brief MSPs on the film's findings. Subsequent debates included: 1) a Commons debate on **6 January 2016** on 'Child Prisoners and Detainees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories', in which Whitford expressly shared the concerns of the film; 2) an address on the possibility for secular democracy in Israel and Palestine by the prize-winning Israeli journalist Gideon Levy, followed by a Q&A session, on **24 May 2016**, organised by Rooney and Richard Burden MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Palestine; 3) a public debate on the peace process and the One State solution with Ilan Pappé and Gideon Levy on **25 May 2016**, which attracted 180 attendees and was filmed for YouTube, achieving 27,000+ viewings, with many comments highlighting its importance in demonstrating ways forward [d].

The film [R2] was also taken up as a campaign tool between 2016 and 2017 by Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights (LPHR) and Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP). Tareq Shrourou, Director of LPHR, notes that the film 'has constituted an important campaign tool for us in building platforms with NGOs that share our concerns', and that it was successful 'in raising awareness of

the issues at stake among different audiences [LPHR] engage[s] with, ranging from law students to lawyers to parliamentarians' [e]. Dr Aimee Shalan, Chief Executive of MAP, confirms the central use of the film 'in a letter-writing to MPs campaign' [e], which resulted in growing support for Early Day Motion 563 on Military Detention of Palestinian Children by Israeli Authorities', tabled on **20 November 2017**, signed by 145 MPs across six parties, and debated in the Commons on **7 February 2018**. Marsha de Cordova MP, then Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions, echoed the title and argument of the film in her speech at this debate when she noted that the detention of Palestinian children is a 'system [...] designed to repress, crush and intimidate generation after generation of Palestinians' [d]. The outcome of the debate was a resolution to support justice for child prisoners.

Community- and Trust-Building Through Arts Activism

Rooney's research has also enabled community- and trust-building initiatives in various post-conflict societies. Her film *White Flags* [R4], made to disseminate Lebanese expertise on these matters, has been shown in galleries and at events internationally, including in Lebanon, Croatia, Cyprus (2015), and Egypt (2016), with media coverage. The Nicosia screening on World Poetry Day 2015 exceptionally brought people together across sectarian divides and provided impetus for the ensuing bridge-building anthology *Nicosia Beyond Barriers* (Saqi Books, 2018), whose editors participated in the event and drew inspiration from it. The film was screened at the Freud Museum, London, in 2015, and it has been taken up by Brazilian psycho-social professionals working in the favelas of Puerto Rico for repeat screenings in the context of the Newton Fund/Brazil-UK Testimonial Clinics Programme and Professional Development Centres for Psychological Repair and Tackling Violence. The UK partner for that cooperation confirms that 'the film's ideas on trust building were felt to be most usefully applicable to the psychotherapy practices of Brazilian colleagues' [f].

Drawing on the Lebanese initiatives explored in *White Flags* [R4], Rooney furthered local public engagement in post-revolutionary Egypt through involving disadvantaged neighbourhoods in their shared cultural heritage. While heritage is mainly managed at an institutional level in Egypt, Rooney introduced arts activist approaches to community engagement in historic Cairo. Fekri Hassan, former adviser to the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, confirms that Rooney's work helped to 'open up new venues for how heritage is conceived and to promote investment in literature, music and art as a contribution to Egypt's cultural capital' [g]. Ventures included a 2016 memorabilia exhibition mounted by the High Institute for Folk Arts and co-curated with the local residents of El-Moez Street; an art exhibition in 2017 at Beit el-Sinaari showcasing the work of young artists responding to the 'living heritage' of the area [g; h]; and workshops in 2016 on Egyptian dream interpretation involving local sheikhs (responsible for the shrine of Ibn Sirin, author of *Taabir Al Ro'oya* [*Interpretation of Dreams*]) and working-class residents in relation to social dreaming. A recent book chapter (2019) about these dream interpretation workshops describes their outcomes as 'a new methodology' and 'a shared aesthetic language across cultures' [i], noting the benefits of the project to the local community.

Rooney's work with the band Oxford Maqam, a UK-based Arabic ensemble comprising vocalists and musicians, led to the rediscovery a lost strand of musical heritage (the Nahda) being brought to Egyptian musicologists and musicians, enabling them to revive this tradition at a concert on **25 March 2017** at the Egyptian Centre for Culture and the Arts (Makan) in Cairo for the benefit of local audiences [i]. In addition, a new tour guide map of El-Moez Street was produced, together with a new Naguib Mahfouz walking tour map [g; i]. The outputs of the project were taken up by the Egyptian Ministries of Tourism and Culture, with whom Rooney's Egyptian colleagues have continued to work in the area of folk and popular arts. Fekri Hassan confirms that: 'One of the main achievements of the project is a policy brief to governments, universities and the public with a plan for future investment in cultural heritage as a driver of economic and social development' [g].

Furthering Creative Arts Exchanges and Education through Consultancies

Rooney's expertise in working with artists in the Middle East led to her invitation to act as consultant curator of the 2016 Masāfāt festival organised by the Institute of Contemporary Arts

(ICA), taking place in Cairo and London. The Curator of Education Partnerships at the ICA confirms that Rooney's 'expertise [...] in the area of contemporary Middle Eastern culture was essential for the development of the 2016 Masāfāt Festival' and led directly to practitioner exchanges between young UK and Arab film-makers and musicians [j]. Rooney has also acted as international consultant for Qatar Foundation arts projects and for research at the Doha Institute (2017-18) concerned with understanding the cultural transnationalism of the Arab uprisings. She has briefed civil servants, arts organisation CEOs, funders, and researchers at the Centre for Science and Policy (Cambridge) on social interventions through the arts. This work has resulted in a confidential policy briefing entitled 'An overview of UK policy priorities and how the arts and humanities can help to address them', in which Rooney is quoted [k].

In 2019, due to her work on Palestinian child prisoners, Rooney was appointed a Trustee of the charity Ajyal Foundation for Education, which supports the rehabilitation of conflict-affected children through creative educational projects with schools. Rooney's work on how the prison system is used to break resilience [R1] is central to Ajyal's new socio-emotional learning programme, as confirmed by its CEO and co-founder: 'Ajyal has benefitted from [Rooney's] research on how resilience is undermined in a Palestinian context with a view to how it may be rebuilt, along with the re-building of trust' [l]. The programme helps to re-engage conflict-affected pupils who are struggling with their schooling through a holistic approach to education. It has been rolled out to six schools in the West Bank with the support of the Palestinian Ministry of Education, directly benefiting '103 educators and [...] 1885 children currently attending the schools' [l]. In 2020, Ajyal put together an education pack for Palestinians needing to home school due to social isolation during the pandemic, over which Rooney was consulted [l].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[a] Examples of policy advice on cultural soft power (House of Lords select committee on 'Soft Power and the UK's Influence', 2014: evidence; final committee report) and religious literacy (policy document 'Religion, Security and Global Uncertainties', 2015).

[b] Letter of support from a leading Palestinian activist and author and a patron of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign.

[c] Al Jazeera news report on the play *The Keepers of Infinite Space*, broadcast on 4 February 2014. Video clip on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-jyt9OMfgM>

[d] Debates influenced by *Breaking the Generations*: House of Commons debate on 'Child Prisoners and Detainees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories' (6 January 2016); Commons debate on Palestinian Children and Israeli Military Detention (7 February 2018); One State debate (25 May 2016) on YouTube with comments. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35JXout9ooc>

[e] Letters of support from: 1) Director of Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights (LPHR); 2) Chief Executive of Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP).

[f] Email from Psychotherapist and Group Analyst.

[g] Extracts from short documentary (9:21 minutes) summarising the activities and outcomes of 'Egypt's Living Heritage'. <https://youtu.be/kj2BKq6rS2s>

[h] Report (in Arabic) on Youth Art Exhibition on El-Moez Street (2017), highlighting community engagement.

[i] Outcomes of Egypt's Living Heritage [G3]: 1) extracts from book chapter on 2016 dream workshops; 2) Oxford Maqam at Makan concert; 3) Naguib Mahfouz walking tour map.

[j] Letter of support from the Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

[k] Policy briefing by AHRC: 'An overview of UK policy priorities and how the arts and humanities can help to address them'.

[l] Letter of support from the CEO and co-founder of the Ajyal Foundation for Education.