



Making sense of austerity: Everyday narratives in Denmark and the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Everyday narratives are grounded in how people make sense of their world. This article suggests that everyday narratives are made up of storysets with categories of meaning, story-lines that provide a temporal understanding, and plots that establish the common characters and scenes. These narrative elements are part of a sensemaking process where people are trying to understand their personal situation, changes to their households, and the national economy. We apply this logic to a study of online comments' sections for 240 newspaper articles on austerity in Denmark and the United Kingdom. Characters such as 'scroungers' and 'corporate criminals' are identified, as are scenes such as the decline of the welfare state and the rise of technocracy. We link the storysets, story-lines, and plots together to understand how Brits and Danes are making sense of austerity. Their explanations and frustrations improve our understanding of who acts in everyday politics, and how everyday narratives are formed and maintained.

Keywords

austerity, Britain, Denmark, everyday politics, sensemaking

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Introduction

How can we talk sensibly about 'everyday narratives?' The concept behind this Special Issue raises an immediate paradox – who has voice over everyday when the basic concept of everyday politics is to reveal the voices of those we assume do not have power? How then can the narrator have authority without usurping the voices he or she claims to represent? To our minds, there are three options in our home field, International Political Economy, and all three choices are useful for different purposes.

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The first can be found in the 'Everyday Life' literature that draws from Henri Lefebvre and can be found in the work of Matt Davies, Paul Langley, Johnna Montgomerie, Phoebe Moore, and others (see Davies, 2006, 2015 for overviews). Here, discussions of everyday life focus on critiques of processes happening to people, such as financialization and changes in work conditions, and how they create subjectivities we should recognize (Langley, 2008; Montgomerie, 2009; Moore, 2012). The scholar provides the narratives from a critical view on the changes in everyday life, linking these processes to broader systemic transformations in modern capitalism.

The second option is to go for everyday autobiography (see Smith and Watson, 1996). Of course questions can be raised about how representative the author's experience is, but the point of such scholarship is not to provide a survey but to provide first-hand insights into how everyday life and everyday politics is changing.

The third option draws on the work developed by Ben Kerkvliet (1990), Jim Scott, and others on 'Everyday Politics'. This work stresses how informal seemingly mundane acts of resistance are important and can be distinguished from formal advocacy and official politics (Kerkvliet, 2005, 2009). The interpretation of Kerkvliet's work in International Political Economy has stressed a focus on studying 'who acts' alongside more traditional questions in the field such as 'who governs' and 'who benefits' (Elias and Rethel, 2016; Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007). The narrator's authority ideally comes from providing a convincing account of how informal acts matter for broader political, economic, and social change (see attempts in Broome, 2009; Seabrooke, 2006, 2007). Still, there is a logical problem of how informal acts create something so grand as to be called a 'narrative'.

In this piece, we sketch out some conceptual devices to think about how everyday acts lead to broader narratives about everyday life and everyday politics. We provide a conceptual skeleton, drawing from previous scholars interested in narrative construction, including Walter Fisher (1984), Barbara Czarniawska (2004a), and, more recently, Frédéric Godart and Harrison White (2010).

The basic approach here is that people are storytellers, that they seek to provide 'good reasons' to support their narratives, which are grounded in situational environments, and that stories can be recognized by others as probable and true (Fisher, 1984: 7–8). We provide an application through a study of readers' online comments to stories about austerity in major broadsheet and tabloid newspapers in Denmark and the United Kingdom. While these narratives are obviously informed by politicians, opinion leaders, and think tanks, we suggest that they provide fragments of grander narratives on what austerity means for the difficult situation that many households are finding themselves in (see also Widmaier, 2009). Our application is based on a sampling of 240 online newspaper articles about austerity from Denmark and the United Kingdom in 2013–2014. We make no claim to providing a comprehensive audit of media coverage during this period, but have extracted, using our own sensemaking process, the key 'storysets', plots, and story-lines that make up everyday narratives. In short, our pitch is that everyday acts, such as online comments, are part of a sensemaking process about what austerity means, and that this process feeds into broader narratives of political, economic, and social change.

Composing everyday narratives

We begin from the premise that everyday narratives are built on smaller components, so we need some conceptual tools to help us put the pieces together. While this is an unusual request for International Political Economy scholarship, there are a number of clues

in sociology, anthropology, and organization studies to assist us. First among these is the sensemaking literature associated with Karl Weick (1995) and others. For Weick sensemaking is a process whereby actors confront events by extracting cues from their environment to retrospectively produce a plausible narrative of what is happening – making sense of the situation. People's identity is important to the kinds of cues extracted and narrative formation is an outcome of the process. Sensemaking can also be considered to be prospective as people articulate expectations about the future and plausible changes to their life chances (Borrás and Seabrooke, 2015). Weick (1995: 36) suggests that sensemaking provides the 'feedstock for institutionalization', the stuff from which institutional changes can occur. This feedstock is actually narrative production, permitting the telling of stories that can create or hinder change. When aggregated, these stories can be understood as a discourse, the production of which is vital to institutional change (Schmidt, 2010).

Czarniawska's (2004a, 2010) work on narrative formation provides some further clues on how everyday fragments through expressions of opinion may lead to a broader narrative. Czarniawska's approach starts from the premise that each family, household, and workplace has a historical repertoire of stories. The trick is getting access to them, be it through interviews, focus groups (Stanley, 2014), or through online opinion fora, as attempted here. These stories are not always told in a straightforward A>B manner. Stories will be told in both chronologic and *kairotic* time (Czarniawska, 2004b). Most people favour the latter, with stories rarely following a 'in 2001 I did this, in 2002 I did that' format and, rather, as an illustrative example, 'I worked in a shop when I was 15, that gave me some experience of tedium that helps me through my normal day as a call centre operator now'. Stories and their fragments commonly jump back and forth in time rather than following a linear progression through history. As chronology cannot provide causality by itself, those telling stories need to reflect and project through time to make their tales convincing.

Stories are primarily relational rather than temporal, which means we need to link everyday narratives to social relations. Godart and White (2010) suggest that stories and narratives are used by people to cope with uncertainty. They usefully break down stories into component parts, which they refer to as 'storysets', 'story-lines', and 'plots'. Storysets are categorical rather than relational; they 'classify without relating', reducing the number of meanings into a recognizable pattern (Godart and White, 2010: 574). They are identifications of patterns with similar meanings but need not have an established relationship with each other. 'Welfare burdens' is a general category of stories that frequently appeared in our study below. We have an immediate idea of what types of storysets emerge from them, even without a clear timeline, characters, or plot. The fragments of online commentary we discuss are examples of storysets given that the conversation in online comments' sections sometimes flow but is often sporadic with fleeting interjections. Bridging storysets, story-lines collect events into temporal structures that help people cope with uncertainty. Story-lines are narratives that contain information about how parts of the story relate to each other and also contain normative preferences about what the story means for past and future behaviour. Important for these views is the articulation of plots, which are 'generic characters and scenes that can be transposed from one story-line to another' (Godart and White, 2010: 576). Plots relate to them to grander understandings of cultural traits and structural characteristics, opportunities, and constraints. Together, storysets, story-lines, and plots are the components of everyday narratives. In our analysis, we identify these components in online commentary about austerity in Denmark and the United Kingdom.

Cases and data

We reviewed the 20–25 most popular¹ comments for 240 Danish and British newspaper articles regarding austerity, youth unemployment, and public sector reform from 2013 to 2014. For the United Kingdom, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* were chosen as the sources on the grounds of their wide readership and active online comments' section. For Denmark, the newspapers selected were *Politiken* and *Ekstra Bladet*. *Politiken* is a centre-left broadsheet newspaper, not unlike *The Guardian* in the British context. To broaden our net wider, we also included *Ekstra Bladet*, a tabloid newspaper that has the largest daily circulation in Denmark and is similar to *The Daily Mail* in its tabloid content and wide readership. The newspapers have discussion sections on their websites. *Politiken* discussions, like *The Guardian*, are usually more intellectually driven, while the more heated debate in *Ekstra Bladet* is characterized by short 'zingers'. For this piece, we have quoted from the most popular comments as we have deemed appropriate. That is to say, the quotes provide storyset fragments that belong to story-lines and have a strong plot to connect them (see Appendix 1).² The comments were coded through the qualitative coding software NVivo. Through the coding process storysets emerged that allowed us to relate their elements to story-lines and plots. The comments presented show storysets in two ways. First, they are broadly representative of the consensus in the publication studied. Second, they illustrate how particular news items are mapped onto social relations as commentators link events to types of stories (storysets), types of characters and scenes (plots), and opinions about how society should function (story-lines).

Denmark and the United Kingdom have been chosen as two polities that have experienced the post-crisis years differently. The United Kingdom saw an initial increase in unemployment, but has since passed a range of measures to manage public debt, which have followed a strong austerity narrative and decreased public benefits (OECD, 2015a). Unemployment rates have partially fallen, in part, by the lowering of labour standards through part-time work and 'zero-hour contracts' (OECD, 2015a). At the same time, bank bailouts provoked much anger about government waste and elite political and economic networks. Denmark also had a range of failing banks that received mixed support from the government. In the post-crisis period the unemployment rate increased, but then stabilized at a level not too far from the pre-crisis levels (OECD, 2015b). A strong austerity narrative has been framed around reducing 'corn fed' institutions, such as universities, to provide greater fiscal space to deal with the welfare and health needs of an ageing society. In both Denmark and the United Kingdom, politicians have used the crisis as a frame for further austerity in reforming and downsizing the public sector (Blyth, 2013). In both cases, there has been a shift to the right in formal politics, backed by populism.

Austerity narratives in the United Kingdom

Our aim here is to identify the key storysets in the United Kingdom and Danish cases. In the United Kingdom, they are the notions of 'Scroungers', 'Living Beyond Our Means', 'Banker Bashing', 'Charity Begins at Home', and the 'Need for a New Politics'. We take our storysets in turn to understand everyday narratives of austerity.

Scroungers

[Original Comment] I left school at a very early age, and struggled. I was entitled to about £35 a week in benefits at the time, and the normal was about £70. Why should someone a few days/

weeks/months/years older than someone else, be more deserving? If anything else, the older people have had more time to get on their own two feet. There are lots of younger people out there who have no support, from anyone. (Breaders)

[Reply] Contributed nothing, entitled to shitloads. A brilliant summary of our national disease. (Amandahugenkiss)

The original comment in this storyset here is an intergenerational equity issue, that the younger carry a heavier burden than the post-war baby boom generation. Such comments are sensemaking efforts about expectations, and particularly the readjustment of those expectations given story-lines about who is entitled to what (Seabrooke, 2015). *Amandahugenkiss*'s reply comment is also of interest. As Owen Jones (2012) portrayed, there are a range of negative narratives revolving around working-class people and members of society who are dependent on public benefits. This narrative also plays into how some agents diagnose the state of the United Kingdom; that the welfare system is being made unsustainable due to 'scroungers' who live off benefits rather than contribute to society. This is a narrative that plays in to a longer line of debate regarding the British welfare system, which has been exacerbated by the current crisis:

I always find it funny how people from abroad find jobs even though they are in another country and use a foreign language, but English 'youth' cannot find work. So why do I see them going to pubs every day? Maybe go to the university and learn some skills, other than downing a pint and playing darts? (Comsat)

While those whose benefits are being cut are evidently angry, the scrounger is an important plot point in popular story-lines about why austerity is important – too much spending from an overly empowered state has empowered layabouts to underperform (see also Stanley, 2016). In this view, the existence of public benefits makes for a lazy, entitled workforce. From our reading of comments' sections linked to *Daily Mail* and *Guardian* articles, the plot of the 'scrounger' role is often replaced with 'lazy Southern Europeans' as a cultural term for both Mediterranean states and citizens of Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

Living beyond our means

In these storysets, the state is beset by fundamental economic crises (see also Samman, 2015). Of particular interest is the replacement of the macroeconomic logic of the state with the microeconomic logic of the household (see also Best and Widmaier, 2006). As Liam Stanley (2014, 2016) has also demonstrated, in Britain, the state is treated as a household that cannot live beyond its means. If you are spending more than you are making, or if you are unable to pay off your debts, you must save in order to do so (see Seabrooke, 2010):

Labour thought it amusing to leave a note saying 'there is no money left' after their Mugabesque spending spree designed to buy votes. We needed austerity as previously did countries like Spain and Greece but their rulers ducked it and they are now in the shit. We could have been with them if we had had another dose of Balls. Yes austerity has hit our standard of living but without it we could have had the Joy of 25% unemployment, Cuts to pensions, mass redundancies, taxes on savings and riots in the streets. (NizwaNed)

From this sensemaking, austerity is a necessary evil, which will give those people who work a larger slice of the cake (see Ashbee, 2015).

Banker-bashing

Another significant bunch of storysets can be found in commentary about the financial sector (Christensen et al., 2015). Many of the comments in the *Guardian* focus on the role of multinational corporations, and particularly investment banks, in the global financial crisis, associating it with increasing inequality – in the United Kingdom and globally:

Inequality is built into the system. Nowadays the poor will pay while the folly of the Banking class gets rewarded with unending bonuses for shuffling money around. (Addison Jones)

As storysets, these comments contribute to story-lines about how banks and financiers have not atoned for their mistakes, that regulation is too lax, and that the state perpetuates an elite economic class that is unaccountable:

The only people who have benefited from the recovery are the same people who caused the crash in the first place, the political elite and bankers. The rest of us will and are lucky to find any crumbs that will fall from their table. (Mrkinkladze)

The banker-bashing story-lines place focus on ‘corporate criminals’ in their plots, and in some cases, that the government is ‘in on it’. In this, the proponents of these story-lines see the wealthy as part of a club that exercises its power with the sole purpose of creating more wealth and power for itself (Tsingou, 2015).

Charity begins at home

A related storyset to that of government misspending is one of ‘charity begins at home’. In this storyset, austerity should be relieved by cutting overseas aid, immigration policies, and development efforts:

And what about the 12 billion we give away in overseas aid? We have to make all these cuts and job losses yet other countries continue to receive more and more of our money that could be used to save hospitals or increase council budgets! (Michael24)

This narrative was particularly strong among commenters on the *Daily Mail* website and dictates that the British state should put British citizens before all other people:

3 million unemployed 9 million economic migrants. Easy restrict migrants to 3 million and give the youth of BRITIAN a chance. Easy. (andeecee)

The critique is not a cultural one, but rather economic in its argument. The commenters argue that foreign aid, immigration and the European Union (EU) is too costly, and is diverting funds from welfare for the Brits. Simultaneously, supporters of this storyset find that no establishment parties are willing to do so, leading to a strong support for the UK Independence Party.

The need for a new politics

The Thatcher era has, for many left-wing progressives in the United Kingdom, served as ground zero for the neoliberal transformation of the welfare state (cf. Jones, 2012). While narratives of austerity in the post-global financial crisis age are distinct, they refer back to this specific point in time as important (see Hay, 1996):

Tories always leave a lost generation behind, every time. The workless households they keep on about started in Thatcher's years. They leave behind poor infrastructure, poor population, a long list of graduate who will never work to their potential. And poverty caused by their cuts, which might save a few pounds in the short term, but which will cost us dear, in poor health, undereducated children who will never reach their potential. They are not fit to govern. (Szwalby)

From the Tories point of view this is working out exactly as they want – people working until they die, starvation wages, the sick and disabled killed off and food banks replacing welfare. It is the Victorian society they so admire brought back to life. What are Labour doing, for crying out loud? (Surpluspop1)

Political disillusionment with the political system is common in the *Guardian* and *Daily Mail* comments. Here the view is that the Labour Party of 2013–2014 would act no differently on austerity policies than the Conservatives. Such frustrations are part of a broader trend of a change from mass parties to cartel parties, where both traditional Social Democratic and Conservative parties offer the same policy choice to what they perceived as the average voter (Blyth and Katz, 2005):

This is the culmination of ruinous free market policies by both Tory and Labour govt's, coupled with the slavish adherence to EU dictats and procurement rules. The free market has seen much of our companies and infrastructure sold off to overseas interests milking the dividends and sheltering the profits and moving production abroad hence why corporation tax receipts are so drastically down [...]. (A Alan)

The above storysets are also fuelled by popular activism. Russell Brand's acts of advocacy through using comedy to highlight 'corporate greed' and inequality are noted (on this see Brassett, 2016). Part of these storysets speak to the notion that we have moved from a period of mass collective 'social democratic' forms of organizing protect to more neoliberal individuals forms (Gilroy, 2013), exemplified by the London riots (Aiello and Pariente, 2013). Such a transformation suggests that making sense of austerity happens in an environment where grounded political identities are insufficient in assisting collective action. In the 2015 British elections, the Conservative party won an outright majority, permitting it to shake lose from its coalition with the Liberal Democrats and pursue welfare and public benefits reform in line with much of the content of the everyday narratives above, pursuing a new 'blue collar conservatism'. The rise of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour party leader provides a contrast, that the public can be reengaged through more grassroots efforts that the cartel party system has long dismissed.

Austerity narratives in Denmark

In Denmark, austerity cuts were less severe than in the United Kingdom, but the public response to the economic downturn has produced a range of storysets comparable to those identified in the United Kingdom. Important here are notions of welfare tightening and living within one's means (similar to the *kartoffelkuren* 'potato diet' that followed the 1980s housing bust, see Mortensen and Seabrooke, 2008), as well as developing Denmark as a 'competition state' (Pedersen, 2011). We identify the four main storysets as 'Lazy Poor' (akin to 'scroungers'), 'Charity Begins at Home', the 'Screaming Ham', and 'Faceless Technocrats'. Again, we take each in turn.³

The lazy poor

A persistent story-line in the Danish newspapers studied is a discussion about whether it pays to work, and what incentives the 'lazy poor' need to get off the couch. In this everyday narrative two real-life characters, known from media stories, are particularly important for the plot: 'Lazy Robert' and 'Poor Carina'. 'Lazy Robert' is a man who, by his own admission, does not want to take on a job unless it is perfect for him and is more than able to survive on public benefits. He does not have any medical issues that would prevent him from working, which makes him the poster boy for how wrong the benefit system is among commentators. 'Poor Carina' is a single mother, who went on the record stating that she is having a hard time making ends meet on benefits. However, further investigation revealed she is receiving more in benefits than the lowest paid workers in Denmark:

It is much easier and far more efficient to just lower the payments and particularly all the additions that the social security recipients receive. More bureaucracy and control costs money, and only solves part of the problem. It is still better for a large part of the population to be on benefits. (K Jimmi)

The notion of the 'lazy poor', akin to the 'scroungers' in the United Kingdom, is a persistent story-line, leading to arguments for the lowering of the minimum wage, the tightening of benefits control, and a reduction of benefits overall. In this storyset, 'Poor Carina' and 'Lazy Robert' are easily replaced as plot points by other characters, including 'non-ethnic Danes'.

Charity begins at home

In Denmark, there has been a heightened perception that austerity falls disproportionately on Danes and that there is a drain on the public purse through 'welfare tourism' or 'benefits tourism'. This storyset is similar to the 'Charity Begins at Home' one in the British context:

Of course they don't want a job. They did not come here to get a job. They came here for the generous benefits. (K Arash)

This 'welfare tourism' storyset feeds into a persistent story-line about how the Danes should tighten benefits to non-Danes. All the major political parties have a reform agenda on migration and asylum policies, with nearly all increasing thresholds for welfare benefits or lengthening qualification periods for entitlements. It is particularly aimed at Eastern Europeans as likely welfare tourists, while there is also a common framing of Southern Europeans as lazy in the same manner as in the United Kingdom. In the Danish 2015 elections, the far-right Danish People's Party, which explicitly rejects multiculturalism and calls for migration restrictions, received 21% of the vote, making it the second largest party. The party backs the Danish Liberal Party (*Venstre*), which formed a minority government and has since sought explicitly to make refugees and migrants refrain from seeking asylum in Denmark.

'The screaming ham'

In the initial post-crisis period, Denmark was led by the centre-right Liberal Party's coalition government, which started a series of reforms regarding the benefit system and public

services. After the 2011 election, the Social Democratic Party formed a left-leaning coalition government. The election was won on the basis of a series of promises on providing better social services, greener infrastructure, and improved public schooling. Many of these promises failed to materialize, while the government pursued a course of reforming the public benefits system. The Minister of Employment during the first 3 years of this government was Mette Frederiksen of the Social Democratic Party. She is a major character in Danish online commentary on austerity. Note in the following quotation, the Thatcherite line on seeing individuals rather than society:

The problem with Mette Frederiksen and the party that used to be social democratic is that they have given up running the country. When you threaten the unemployed with meaningless activities and a loss of benefits, the goal is not to decrease unemployment. The goal is to tell the unemployed, that they are the masters of their own fate, and to tell others that unemployment is not a societal issue, but an issue for the unemployed. (Steen Grønland)

Frederiksen is often referred to in newspaper comments as the ‘screaming ham’ (*Skrigeskinken*). The ‘screaming ham’ is highly negative and gendered image of a woman who sings loudly but poorly, or, in this context, gives public speeches in a shrill voice about issues on which she is not adequately informed. For Frederiksen, the critique also includes the view that she advocates policies for the general public that she does not follow in private. This obviously talks to gender politics in Denmark and the role of women in politics in what is generally considered to be a high feminized society.

Faceless technocrats

Dissatisfaction with the Social Democrats’ last government is also connected to a view that politics has become too technocratic and that those speaking are increasingly distinct from the public. Henrik Bang’s important distinction between ‘everyday makers’ and ‘expert citizens’ zooms in on this broader development in Denmark, tracing a difference between those who choose to speak for citizens and those who engage in civic duties (the football club, the parent–teacher meetings) on an everyday basis (Bang and Sørensen, 1999). Such perceptions contribute to a storyset about the ‘faceless technocrat’ in politics, about the state being run by the ministries – and the consultancies providing services to the ministries – rather than the ministers. The employees in the ministries typically belong to the professional association DJØF (Danish Association for Lawyers and Economists). The notion of ‘DJØFification of society’ has been commented on, including criticism of neoliberal discourses, and ‘spreadsheet’ approaches to life that reinforce technocratic control and political isolation. The ministerial employees are said to exist in a technocratic echo chamber, situated geographically in Copenhagen, with little connection to the world outside itself. To counter this, the Danish government proposed the relocation of 3900 employees across a range of authorities to various towns in the fall of 2015 (Finansministeriet, 2015).

Conclusion

The purpose of this think piece is to consider how everyday narratives are composed. We suggest, using the language employed by Godart and White (2010), that everyday narratives are made up of storysets, story-lines, and plots. Storysets can be seen as interjections based on categories of things. The online comments from newspapers fit this idea well – they are short statements made in response to newspaper articles on austerity. These statements do not necessarily relate to the journalist who wrote the story or even to others making

comments. They are statements that express opinions about how things are and how the economy should work. In our view, online newspaper comments' sections are a particularly fruitful site for piecing together what we can understand as everyday narratives.

We have provided an application through a study of online comments in major newspapers in Denmark and the United Kingdom. Reading these interjections across 240 newspaper articles from *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *Politiken*, and *Ekstra Bladet*, we suggest that storysets suggest both story-lines and plots. Story-lines give meaning over time. Plots suggest particular characters and scenes that can easily be read across story-lines to allow people to build a narrative about how things are. As can be seen above, characters in plots can be changed without disturbing story-lines as long as the storyset is stable – such as replacing 'scroungers' with 'lazy poor' or 'lazy Southern European'. These component parts of everyday narratives are part of a sensemaking process as people in Denmark and the United Kingdom are trying to make sense of austerity and what it means for their lives. To do so, they draw on cues from identity and experience, as well as expectations about how life will change. The characters such as the scrounger, self-entitled loser youth, the greedy banker, the economic migrant, and single mothers fit into common plots about the decline of the welfare state, the need for political renewal, the rise of technocratic elites, and the shamelessness of protected financiers. Identifying storysets helps us to understand how, with story-lines and plots, everyday narratives are composed.

Finally, our role here is not to judge the merits of the interventions made in the online comments' sections but to note how these everyday narratives are constructed. They are acts of everyday politics in the sense that they are informal interventions that commonly defy authorities and propose an alternative way of being. Whether or not they blame the wrong characters is a different question from whether or not they have a capacity to act and voice opinions about their life chances. And here we return to our initial point about the authority of the observer. Those working in the Everyday Life tradition critique meso and macro processes that can be found in the everyday. This is a very useful task but not the analytical tactic deployed here. Everyday politics seeks to move from the micro and bottom-up in understanding how people make sense of their world and how they act informally to change it. Online comments are one minor form of doing so. To our minds, studying everyday acts impels us to work from the bottom-up, identifying the storysets and how they relate to story-lines and plots. This incremental approach means that culture and structure become second-order concepts. Such an approach is a challenge for International Political Economy scholars where structure and culture are common analytical starting points, but the upside is the opportunity to reveal new information about what people think about the everyday that does not fit with our assumptions. Once this information has been obtained, we then need to find ways of connecting the micro to the macro to form our own narratives about possibility and change. And that is a sensemaking challenge of our own.

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Notes

1. The comments with most 'likes' or 'upvotes'.
2. The quotes are brought as they were online, spelling, and grammar included. The commenter's usernames are used as signatures here.
3. Quotes are our translation.

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Appendix I

Quotes from comments' sections from these articles

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