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Contesting Power from Below: Grassroots Resistance, Civil Society Agency, and the Transformation of Governance

Wednesday 3 June 2026 09:00 (1h 30m)

This panel examines how civil society actors engage in resistance through unexpected channels and ambiguous spaces of power. Moving beyond traditional frameworks that position resistance as simply oppositional to state authority, the papers explore how communities, activists, and organisations navigate, appropriate, and contest institutional structures from below. The panel brings together diverse empirical cases—from climate activism in Portugal to unarmed civilian protection in conflict zones, from civil society engagement with international criminal justice to community organisations negotiating counter-terrorism funding, to peace-building in post-conflict Colombia—to illuminate the complex dynamics of contemporary resistance. Each paper demonstrates how grassroots actors do not merely oppose power structures but actively reinterpret, reclaim, and transform institutional spaces and discourses to advance alternative visions of justice, security, and accountability. Collectively, the papers contribute to critical debates on the politics of nonviolent action, local agency in transnational governance, and the everyday practices through which marginalised communities contest both physical and structural violence. The panel reveals how resistance operates within contested terrains where support and critique, protection and opposition, engagement and refusal intersect in ways that challenge state monopolies on security, justice, and legitimate action.

Track Classification: Critical Studies on Terrorism Working Group