

Middle of Where, East of What? New Geographies of Conflict

Symposium – Thursday, 14 July 2016, In English

It can be argued that the Middle East, as a geo-political region, has been defined in relation to the so-called West throughout much of modern history. Western involvement has had considerable impact in both carving national boundaries and shaping new political realities on the ground. Focusing on the years between WW2 and the present, the symposium examines this history through the current political moment, and asks how new geographies have been created through transregional movements, upheavals, migrations, and conflicts.

The symposium discusses the strategic importance that the Middle East has held as a zone of ‘otherness’ or as an ‘elsewhere’, a place thought to be defined by never-ending conflicts. While the region has been marked by international interests, the complexities of the greater Middle East aren’t just generated from the outside; it is a vast and relatively undefined collection of countries undergoing rapid changes, ranging from social movements related to labour, religion, waste, and right-to-the city campaigns, to struggles with economic disparity, civil war, and unstable governing structures. By sketching a relatively loose geography, the discussion will bring the actions of ‘there’ in contact with those of ‘here’ by addressing the various transnational forces that spur movement and conflict. The geographies of the “West” and “East” remain implicated in each other and become visible in cities and peripheries of significance today: from Gafsa, Tunisia to Doha, Qatar and Deir ez-Zor, Syria to Istanbul, Turkey, these places constitute an urban network that has been affected by socio-economic and political movements in a globalizing world - and their transformations are instrumental to tracing the changing boundaries of the Middle East and its relation to a broader geographical context.

The symposium follows a lecture by architectural historian Nasser Rabbat on the evening of 13th July, in which he will explore questions about modernity and tradition in Arab cities.

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U-Bhf Seneffeler Platz (U2)

Programme

14 JULY 2016

14.00 **Introduction:**
Saima Akhtar and Walid El Houri

PART I 14:00 – 16:00
CRITIQUE AND CONFLICT GEOGRAPHIES

Decolonization, West Asia, Global South
Anaheed Al-Hardan
American University of Beirut

Architecture of Migrancy, Critical Geography,
Visualising Conflict Territory
Heba Y. Amin
The Black Athena Collective

Risk, Accident, Aerial Bombardment, Domesticity, Plasticity
Helene Kazan
Goldsmiths University of London

Traumatic Urbanism, Lebanese Civil War
John Hanna
TU Delft

16.00 – 17.00
Coffee Break

PART II 17:00 – 19:00
TERMS AND POLITICS OF MOVEMENT

Willkommenskultur, Integration
Simran Sodhi
DaMigra e.V.

Turkish German Cultural Exchange, Migration, Transnationalism
Ela Gezen
University of Massachusetts – Amherst

Anti-Semitism, Race, Germany
Anna Esther Younes
Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva

Refugees, Lebanon/Syria, Interventions
Fouad Marei
Freie Universität Berlin