

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS & ABSTRACTS

De/constructing the Middle Eastern city: Places, publics, and geographies of global connection
March 30, 2018 at The Maxwell School, Syracuse University

Faculty Organizers: Natalie Koch and Timur Hammond, Department of Geography
SU Institutional Sponsors: Department of Geography; Middle Eastern Studies Program;
Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs, Maxwell School; Humanities Center, College of Arts & Sciences

It is well established in urban studies that cities are nodes of global connectedness. Yet in the prolific calls for – and responses to – developing more comparative urban research, much of this work tends to take the idea of the region for granted. Many cities are still understood as having a unique regional character, such as in common references to the “North American city” or the “African city.” Taking the case of the “Middle Eastern city,” this workshop asks how competing narratives about places and publics *construct* the “Middle East” as a region and the “Middle Eastern city” as a coherent entity in a world of global connection. Yet by asking how the Middle Eastern city is constructed, we necessarily *deconstruct* this impression of coherence.

Like cities, regions are also formed through political contests about identity, belonging, space, and place.¹ The “Middle East” offers a particularly useful lens onto these processes, in no small part because its borders are famously fuzzy, variably including parts of Southwest Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Many urban studies scholars have traced connections across South and Southeast Asia to locate an “Islamic world” or define a unique form of “Islamic urbanism” or an “Arab street,” while a growing body of research positions the Middle East as inextricable from the histories and connections of the Indian Ocean world.² Diverse as these approaches may be, they all point to the wide-ranging geographies of global connection that shape the idea of a “Middle Eastern city” as a discrete site within a world of regions.

But if the Middle Eastern city is a construct without a discernable essence, how does the academic practice of *deconstructing* its alleged coherence relate to the diverse narratives and practices that go into *constructing* the idea of a uniquely Middle Eastern urbanism? How are Middle Eastern cities bounded, conceptually and practically, and in what ways are these borders contested? How are regional identity narratives inscribed onto various sites, structures and infrastructures, built landscapes, and bodies in the city? What kinds of publics are imagined to populate cities of the Middle East? Who are the actors that shape their built form and symbolic meaning, and who is excluded from these processes? How are we to conceptualize the periphery or hinterlands of cities that are so globally connected?

This workshop aims to consider these questions through an interdisciplinary dialogue between geographers and Middle East studies scholars in the social sciences and humanities. We invite participation from scholars (as both presenters and observers) from all disciplines with an interest in exploring the contested places, publics, and geographies of global connection in the Middle East. The deadline for confirming participation is Feb. 19, 2018, with a final schedule to be finalized by Feb. 26.

¹ Paasi, A. 2003. Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question. *Progress in Human Geography* 27 (4): 475-485.

² Abu-Lughod, J. 1987. The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (2): 155-176; Atia, M. 2017. Urban Transformations in the Middle East and North Africa from a Geographical Perspective. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2): 327-330; Bonine, M. et al. (eds.) 2012. *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; Eickelman, Dale. 1974. Is There an Islamic City? The Making of a Quarter in a Moroccan Town. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5 (3): 274-294; El-Kazaz, S. and K. Mazur. 2017. Introduction to Special Section: The Un-Exceptional Middle Eastern City. *City & Society* 29 (1): 148-161; Low, M. 2014. Introduction: The Indian Ocean and Other Middle Easts. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34 (3): 549-555.

PARTICIPANTS

We are seeking participants from all departments and universities in Central New York. If you would like to join the event, please submit the following information to Natalie Koch by **February 19, 2018**: nkoch@maxwell.syr.edu

I. I am [] a faculty member or [] graduate student in: [department, university]

II. Participation:

I would like to give a short (20 minute) research talk at the event, but will not distribute a paper.

ATTACH TALK ABSTRACT OF ~200 WORDS

I would like to have a paper workshoped, with a full draft submitted to the organizers by March 19, 2018.

ATTACH PAPER ABSTRACT OF ~200 WORDS

I am interested in observing and participating in group discussions, but not presenting.

III. Due to several religious holidays on Friday, March 30, we may be able to arrange a special session for the event on Thursday afternoon, March 29. Please also indicate your availability/ preferences regarding the date:

I am available to participate on Friday, 3/30.

I am **not** able to participate on Friday, 3/30, but could join a session on Thursday, 3/29.

Tentative schedule: Friday, March 30, 2018

****With sufficient participant interest:
Thursday, March 30, 2018, 3-5 pm***

9:00 – 9:45	Coffee & Introductions
9:45 – 11:30	Workshop Session I
11:30 – 12:45	Lunch Break
12:45 – 2:15	Workshop Session II
2:15 – 3:00	Coffee Break
3:00 – 5:00	Guest Lecture (<i>Bülent Batuman</i>)
5:00 – 6:00	Closing Reception

GUEST LECTURE: New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism: Negotiating Nation and Islam through Built Environment in Turkey

Bülent Batuman, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Urban Design and Landscape Architecture, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey; Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Pennsylvania State University (2017-18)

This talk will provide an overview of Dr. Batuman’s new book, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism*, which claims that, in today’s world, a research agenda concerning the relation between Islam and space has to consider the role of Islamism rather than Islam in shaping –and in return being shaped by –the built environment. Defining Turkey’s transformation in the past two decades as a process of “new Islamist” nation-(re)building, the book investigates the role of built environment in the making of an Islamist milieu. Drawing on political economy and cultural studies, this talk explores the prevailing primacy of nation and nationalism for new Islamism and the spatial negotiations between nation and Islam. It discusses the role of architecture in the deployment of history in the rewriting of nationhood and that of space in the expansion of Islamist social networks and cultural practices. Looking at examples of housing compounds, mosques, public spaces and the new presidential residence, the talk scrutinizes the spatial making of new Islamism in Turkey through comparisons with relevant cases across the globe: urban renewal projects in Beirut and Amman, nativization of Soviet modernism in Baku and Astana, the presidential palaces of Ashgabat and Putrajaya and the neo-Ottoman mosques built in diverse locations as Tokyo and Washington DC.