

**Urban Studies Seminar  
2016 - 2017****Twice a month,  
Mondays 5 pm - 7 pm****Venue:**Conference Hall  
Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33  
14129 Berlin-NikolasseePlease register  
at the following address:  
Dr. Nora Lafi  
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80307- 0**Annual Theme: Rethinking Urban-Rural Relations in  
an Age of Migration, Displacement, Environmental  
Transformations and Fringe Urbanization****Chaired by Ulrike Freitag, Nora Lafi and  
Katharina Lange****Monday, 5 December 2016, 5 pm****Impoverished Rural Displaced Populations in  
Cities of the African Red Sea Littoral: Between  
Global History and Local Reconfigurations**Lecture by **Steven Serels** (ZMO)

Africa's rural countryside can no longer hold its population. Over the last half century, millions have migrated to ever expanding cities. The population of Africa is now 40 percent urban, a fourfold increase from Second World War levels. This talk will use an examination of urbanization on the African Red Sea Littoral (ARSL) to propose a new way to understand this great migration. In the ARSL, which is comprised of parts of modern day Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti, cultivators and pastoralists have been migrating to cities because the rural countryside is plagued by a crisis defined by structural poverty and endemic violence. Though this great migration began in the middle of the twentieth century, the crisis is much older. Impoverishment and destabilization have been slow processes that have unfolded over generations. To truly understand the urbanization of this region, we have to understand what set off these processes and what has kept them in motion. This talk locates the origins of this process in a mega-drought that lasted from the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries. This ecological disaster disrupted longstanding local patterns of human-environment interaction at a time when shifting global conditions brought renewed imperial interest in the greater Red Sea region. Impoverished and politically weak ARSL communities lacked the resilience to ensure that their own basic subsistence was met and were increasingly forced to turn to violence to steal what they otherwise could not afford. When even violence stopped working, they began abandoning the countryside in large numbers.

**Steven Serels** is an Associate Research Fellow at Zentrum Moderner Orient. He holds a Master's (2007) and a PhD in History (2012), both from McGill University. From 2012 until 2014, he was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University. His research focuses on the economic and environmental history of the Southern Red Sea Region. His research has been supported by grants from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Volkswagen Stiftung and the Social Studies and Humanities Research Council of Canada.