



Twice a month,  
Mondays 5 pm - 7 pm

**Venue:**

Conference Hall  
Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33  
14129 Berlin-Nikolassee

Participants are asked to register  
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The seminar is a joint activity of  
the Zentrum Moderner Orient  
(ZMO) and 'Europe in the Middle  
East – The Middle East in Europe'  
(EUME).

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## Urban Studies Seminar 2012 - 2013

Chaired by Prof. Ulrike Freitag and Dr. Nora Lafi

Annual Theme: Cities as Laboratories of Change

Monday, May 27th, 2013, 5 pm - 7 pm

### Art, Publics and Counter-Publics: On Urbanity and Social Change in Post-Taif Beirut

Lecture by Hanan Toukan

The 1990s were a crucial decade in shaping a counter-hegemonic site of contemporary cultural production in Beirut. The particular body of artistic urban interventions and reflections and the processes that gave rise to them which will be discussed in this talk allowed for a re-visualization of the "postcolonial entity" vis-à-vis itself rather than to the former "empire", so to speak. Imbricated in the extensive debates on post-Civil War reconstruction and the emergent meaning of public space, as well as being consumed with archival and video aesthetics reflecting this, the approach of the post-War art scene paralleled the international art world's tendency toward and interest in conceptual projects embedded in metaphorical approaches that reject "totalizing" theories or grand "metanarratives" of history. Challenging Frederic Jameson's theory that post-colonial cultural production uses the story of the individual to tell the story of the nation, and also in contradistinction to what they perceived as the general trend of their generational predecessors tendency to identify with the Nation in the pre-war period, these post-War artists adamantly opposed being tied to "Lebanon" through their works. Instead they approached specifically Beirut's post-War urban condition and memory as a conceptual space rather than an arena of political contestation over national identity formation. Fanon's oft-repeated claim that "colonialism" forces the people it dominates to constantly ask themselves "in reality who, am I?" is particularly relevant here. For the question forces a re-think of what this opposition to a national identity entails, and what its implications may be: Was identity removed entirely from the equation, or did it take on other forms and meanings in its denunciation by young cultural producers, especially in terms of when and how it came to be presented on the international level and perceived at the local one?

**Hanan Toukan** is a 2012-2013 Postdoctoral Fellow at the Europe in the Middle East/Middle East in Europe (EUME) program at the Forum for Transregional Studies in Berlin where she is an affiliate of the ZMO. She was a Teaching Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London between 2009 and 2012 in the Department of Politics and International Studies and the Center for Media and Film Studies. Toukan's research on cultural and visual politics, traveling theory, contemporary art practices, transnationalism and international cultural aid have appeared in various journals and edited volumes. She obtained her PhD from SOAS, University of London in 2011.