



## Urban Studies Seminar 2018–2019

### Annual Theme:

### The Urban Spatialities of Religion in the Middle East, Africa and South-East Asia

Monday, 28 January 2019, 5 pm



### Islamic Pop:

### A Postcolonial Invention of Islamic Architecture

Lecture by **Farhan Karim** (University of Kansas)

#### Venue

Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient  
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#### In cooperation with:



The formation of Pakistan in 1947 and the formation of the United Nation's Partition Plan for Palestine and later the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 triggered a global interest in the popular form of modern Islamic architecture. Architects across the emerging modern Islamic world favoured reinventing Islamic aesthetic as an antithesis to avant-garde and didactic western modernism.

This talk discusses the formation of this modern "Islamic Pop" in postcolonial Pakistan. The new Pakistani bureaucracy and professionals advocated for a nationalistic vision of "Pakistan-ness" and "Muslim-ness" in architectural form and urban space. Pakistan's constructions of the self through architecture were informed by a combination of popular images of Islam, the West, and the Modern. In the early decades of the foundation of Pakistan, the Western consultants who came from their idiosyncratic backgrounds and were infused with the promise of the typical mission of Western civilization reinforced an Orientalist construction of a postcolonial Muslim self.

To set a critical lens on the rhetoric of this "Islamic Pop" in Pakistan that was based on Pakistani designers and bureaucrat's interpretation of Islamic motifs and space, the lecture focusses on the works of three architects: Edward Durell Stone, Louis I. Kahn and Constantinos Doxiadis. Their architectural interpretations were rooted not in the orientalist intellectual tradition of Europe as criticized by Edward Said, among others, but in the post-war popular American fascination for an exotic and oil-rich Middle East. They also correspond to the systematically invented nationalistic vision of Ayub Khan's martial regime of developmentalist state. "Islamic Pop" explored several ways to destabilize the signifier-signified structure of architectural ornament, form, and function.

**Farhan Karim** is an assistant professor in the School of Architecture and Design at the University of Kansas. He worked as an architect, interior designer and furniture designer in the USA, Bangladesh and Australia. He is the author of *Of Greater Dignity than Riches: Austerity and Housing Design in India* (2019). He edited *Routledge Companion to Architecture and Social Engagement* (2018). He is guest editing a special issue of the *IJIA* entitled *Flows, Boundaries and the Construction of Muslim Selves since 1900* (July 2019). He is currently editing a book entitled *Architectural pedagogy in the Global South* (2021). He is also working on a research monograph entitled *Dreaming of a Nation: Architecture and Cold War modernization of Pakistan*. His research has been supported by the Graham Foundation, Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Aga Khan Center for Muslim Architecture at MIT, Mellon-Volkswagen fellowship, the Getty Research Institute, and Australian Leadership Award.