



Urban Studies Seminar 2012 - 2013

Chaired by Prof. Ulrike Freitag and Dr. Nora Lafi

Annual Theme: Cities as Laboratories of Change

Monday, November 26th, 2012, 5 pm - 7 pm

Twice a month,
Mondays 5 - 7 pm

Venue:

Conference Hall
Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33
14129 Berlin-Nikolassee

Participants are asked to register
at the following address:

Dr. Nora Lafi
nora.lafi@hu-berlin.de
Phone: (+49) (0) 30 80307- 0

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 Forms of Life and Criminality in Contemporary Aleppo and Idlib

Lecture by Zouhair Ghazzal

The project concentrates on criminal case-files from courts located in the north of Syria, more specifically the region of Aleppo, Bab al-Hawa, and Idlib, from the 1980s to the present with a comparative sociological analysis in mind. It aims at the detailed examination of each case-file in terms of constructed narratives within the time framework that would bring a case to maturity and conclusion with its verdict. It draws from a relationship I have nurtured with Greater Syria for over 20 years, in terms of extensive fieldwork research on cities and their political economy, land ownership, and the practices of law from the late Ottoman period to the present.

The importance of the current project on criminal case-files stems from the fact that seldom has violence in Arab societies been documented through the experiences of ordinary people, in their daily routinized habits, and in their relations to state institutions. As soon as a crime occurs, the state intervenes first through its law enforcing agencies, and then through its judicial apparatus, attempting to renegotiate where the social actors, as embedded within their communal power relations, had left. It is at this level that the judiciary process needs to be thoroughly examined, not simply as a process however, but mainly in terms of the fragmented micro-narratives generated by witnesses, plaintiffs and defendants, policemen, lawyers and judges, doctors and psychiatrists, and other court experts. It is indeed the lives of those infamous men and women which is at stake here, lives that would have remained hidden were it not for this sudden eruption of violence, which prompted state intervention, and a violence that was already at works in the most ordinary.

Zouhair Ghazzal is professor of historical and social sciences at Loyola University in Chicago, and visiting professor of photography and film at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. Since his first book on *L'économie politique de Damas au XIXe siècle* (IFPO, 1993), his research has centered on the social, economic, legal and political evolution of Greater Syria since the late Ottoman rule to the present. More precisely, he is interested in the "epistemological gap" that separates the Ottoman social and symbolic representations from the ones under the French mandate up to the present. The historical and anthropological approach straddles between the macro and micro analyses of power relations in various areas of the lifeworld (cities, neighborhoods, property and contract, law, crime, and socio-political formations). His other publications include *The Grammars of Adjudication: The economics of judicial decision-making in fin-de-siècle Ottoman Beirut and Damascus* (IFPO, 2007); (with Baudouin Dupret) *La Syrie au présent* (Paris, 2007); *The Writing of Crime: Narratives and shared meanings in Syrian criminal files* (Stanford University Press, forthcoming). He is currently completing a book-manuscript comparing state and social formations between Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and Syria.