



ZMO-EUME-Colloquium

Twice a month,
Mondays 17:00-19:00

Venue:

Conference Hall
Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33
14129 Berlin-Nikolassee

Participants are asked to register
at the following address:

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the Zentrum Moderner Orient
(ZMO) and 'Europe in the Middle
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www.zmo.de
www.eume-berlin.de
www.forum-transregionale-studien.de
www.h-net.msu.edu/~mediter

Urban Studies Seminar 2011 - 2012

Chaired by Prof. Ulrike Freitag and Dr. Nora Lafi

**Annual theme: Urban Sociability and Urban
Movements (Middle East, North Africa, Iran, Turkey)**

Monday, March 26th, 2012, 5 pm

Syrians in Egypt: Urban Sociabilities and Cultural Colonization?

Lecture by Adam Mestyan

Cultural and social change in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Middle East has been the subject of heated debate in recent decades. Informal and formal European imperialism, Ottoman reform from above, incorporation into world economy, interrelated patriotic movements contributed to the rise of new forms of urban communities. The political aspects of Ottoman Arab modern sociability, entertainment, and intellectual output (in general, the origins of *nahḍa*) are traditionally told as nationalist narratives, as a discovery of early pan-Arabism, or recently as a pre-history of leftist radicalism. Challenging these precepts, I bring an important example of interregional cultural transfer, arguing that Arab theatre-makers from Ottoman Syria arrived to Egypt to offer a loyal Arab culture to Khedive Ismail who previously oppressed genuine Egyptian theatrical experiments. The Syrian already established theatre tradition, a non-subversive but socially engaged modern Arab entertainment, was to replace the Egyptian satirical and rebellious theatre. However, state bankruptcy, the British occupation, and contested khedivial legitimacy created a new situation in the 1880s, thus Christian Syrian theatre-impresarios attempted to achieve success involving Muslim Egyptian singers in their productions. This forged new hybrid music theatre was again offered as a loyal entertainment for Khedive Tefvik and represented a khedivial Arab culture. Instead of a triumphant radicalism, the overtake of Syrians over Egyptian sociability might be framed as an interregional form of cultural colonization. This paper is part of a larger study on the relation of freedom, theatre, and politics in late-nineteenth century Egypt.

Adam Mestyan is a 2011/12 Postdoctoral Fellow of the "Europe in the Middle East – the Middle East in Europe" program of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin where he is working on his book "Theatres and Pashas – Cultural Politics In Late Nineteenth-Century Egypt" about state-formation and art in the Ottoman context. He received his Ph.D. and M.A. from CEU in History (2011 and 2007), two M.A.s from ELTE in Arabic and Semitic Philology (2005) and in Philosophy of Art (2004). His research interests include political and social change in the Modern Middle East, cultural history of Arab lands (especially Egypt), the early Ottoman Arab press, and as hobbies, archival studies and the history of Central-European Orientalism.