



Twice a month,  
Mondays 5 pm - 7 pm

**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  
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## Urban Studies Seminar 2013 - 2014

Chaired by Prof Ulrike Freitag and Dr Nora Lafi

**Annual Theme: The City and its Margins**

**Monday, February 10th, 2014, 5 pm - 7 pm**

### From Cairo to the Urban Margins of Egypt: Centralization, Local Administration and Developmentalism 1945-1965

**A Lecture by Mohamed Kamal Elshahed**

The 1950s state-led modernizing vision aiming to undue the uneven development of the past meant the construction of new infrastructure, new housing, schools and government offices throughout the country. How did the new regime based in Cairo manage this enormous building program extended throughout Egypt's vast geography? My purpose here is to illustrate how an existing culture of centralization in Egypt formed the backbone for the revolutionary state in its efforts to utilize its resources to develop cities, particularly previously under-served areas (and I will provide two examples from the national margin, namely the formally colonial Suez Canal Zone). I argue that the expanded national development and planning program commenced in the 1950s under the Nasser regime continued and further cemented previous policies of centralized municipal management and planning, often with colonial roots, in contradiction to the revolution's promise of self-rule and political empowerment. In the revolutionary state's developmental vision, rather than empower municipal government as representative of local communities able to self-rule, the revolutionary government created exceptional institutions such as the Ministry of Rebuilding Port Said, or the School Premises State Foundation, in order to bypass local administration. By 1962 a new local administration law was issued, which appears in the press as a step towards decentralization. However, the law, I argue, delayed true municipal decentralization and self-rule and planted the seeds for the unshakable domination of local communities by the central state with its single party system putting matters of urban development in the hands of local party members serving the central command in Cairo.

**Mohamed Elshahed** is a EUME-Fellow 2013-2014 at ZMO Berlin. He is an architect and researcher focused on the modern architectural and urban history of the Middle East, particularly Egypt. He is also an observer of contemporary urban and architectural transformations of the region's cities particularly Cairo. His New York University doctoral dissertation *Revolutionary, Modernism? Architecture and the Politics of Transition in Egypt, 1936-1967*, argues that 1950s urban and architectural development associated with Nasserism refashioned preexisting architectural production in the service of Egypt's.