



ZMO-Colloquium Winter Term 2015/2016

*The Future of the City: Contested Urbanism
in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*

Thursday, October 22nd, 2015, 5 pm

Kuwait's Urban Alternative: Youth Activism and Rights to the City

By Dr. Farah Al-Nakib (American University of Kuwait)

Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

This talk analyses newly emerging youth-led approaches to urbanization in Kuwait, a city-state where – as elsewhere in the Arab Gulf – city planning and construction since the discovery of oil in 1946 have been entirely top-down processes. Throughout the first six decades of oil urbanization, state planning authorities focused more on building a spectacle of Kuwait's modernity and progress than on meeting the requirements of the city's inhabitants. Through suburbanization, socio-spatial segregation, privatization, and functional zoning, Kuwait's inhabitants lost what Henri Lefebvre describes as a "right to the city": a right to centrality and a vibrant urban life, and a right to shape and use the spaces of their city to meet their own needs and desires.

Since around 2005, however, various youth-led groups in Kuwait – from entrepreneurs and architects to civil society actors and political protestors – have been pushing for a restoration of such rights to the city in various, largely unconscious, ways. By focusing on a few current examples of such bottom-up movements, and contrasting them with simultaneous state-led projects, this talk examines the impact of these youth groups on city development, and how they are slowly changing Kuwait's planning paradigm for the first time in over sixty years.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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Farah Al-Nakib is Assistant Professor of History and Director of the Center for Gulf Studies at the American University of Kuwait. She obtained her PhD (2011) and MA (2006) in history from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Her research primarily focuses on the urban history of Kuwait City, on which she has written her first book entitled *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford University Press, forthcoming 2016). Her work has also been published in numerous journals and edited volumes. Her latest research analyses the socio-political dynamics and effects of the 1990-91 Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Al-Nakib is also a co-editor of Jadaliyya's Cities Page.