

URBAN VIOLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

New Histories of Place and Event

School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

13th-15th February 2013

Theme and Scope

As part of an AHRC/DFG-funded Anglo-German research project on the history of urban violence in the modern Middle East, this international conference seeks to develop new discussions on the relationship between public violence and urban politics, societies and cultures – a topic that despite its importance and relevance to contemporary events has not yet been the subject of systematic academic interest. For this conference, we wish to bring together a core of established and young historians working on the Middle East, and invite a number of academics specialising on other regions and disciplines, including the social sciences, urban studies and philosophy. The aim is to foster innovative understandings of urban violence informed by comparative and interdisciplinary approaches.

Call for Papers

The conference is open to papers dealing with cities and towns of the Arab world, Iran and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey in the early modern and modern periods, approximately from the late 18th Century to the 1960s. Contributions dealing with later periods will be given consideration provided that they have a very strong historical focus. We do not impose any limitations on the forms of violence considered, as long as they are related to the public arena. We ask that proposed contributions consider one or more of the following themes:

* Public violence as event, calendars of violence

The relationship between violence and historical change has engaged many scholars, from Charles Tilly's focus on war and state making in pre-modern Europe to Franz Fanon's writings on colonial history as one predicated upon violence. The conference seeks to explore this theme in relation to the Middle Eastern city with a focus on the dynamics and actors of specific violent events. In what ways can these actors and events be analysed as reflecting changes in the urban socio-political order and/or as anticipating such changes at crucial junctures in the history of empires and states? The temporal aspects of urban violence as event can be further nuanced by taking into consideration the specific political, social and religious calendars of individuals and groups involved.

* Order and disorder, multiple logics of violence

The ways in which urban actors such as state, colonial and imperial administrations, military and paramilitary groups, police forces and different types of crowds organise, manage, represent and interpret violence is key to understand the dynamics and multiple logics of violent events as a breach of public order. As part of these multiple logics, violence can also be read as one of the options for agency. Can we for instance discern patterns when peaceful means of contestation turn violent? To this end, we invite contributions dealing with: institutional, structural

and operational aspects of violence as linked to legal, bureaucratic, social, political and military arrangements that sustain urban public order, and their change over time; or semantics and symbolic aspects of violence based on narratives on violent events and actors in written and oral sources.

* Urban violence as a form of spatial politics

What has been recently defined as the ‘space turn’ in social studies has demonstrated that the organisation of spatial relations is a constitutive process of violent action. In approaching the city as a theatre of violent acts, different localities might be considered: the street, the square, the neighbourhood, and the wider conurbation to include rural areas and relevant trans-local settings. In this context contributors are also encouraged to investigate the symbolic meaning of urban space and the relationship between public violence and the spatial transformation of cities in the early modern and modern eras as a result of spontaneous urbanisation (and sub-urbanisation) and urban planning.

Submissions

Submissions should include: name of presenter; academic position and institutional affiliation; title of the paper; and contact information (please include e-mail address and telephone number) – all in one Word document – and an abstract of no more than 400 words, in a separate Word document. The two files should be emailed together to Nelida Fuccaro (nf2@soas.ac.uk) and Rasmus Christian Elling (re13@soas.ac.uk) no later than **1st June 2012**. We expect to send notification for accepted abstracts by **1st July 2012**.

It is important that the abstract includes: 1) a clear indication of how the contribution relates to the themes outlined in the call for papers; 2) some indication of sources used; and 3) a brief elaboration on methodology.

Participants are asked to submit a paper by **1st December 2012** to be circulated before the conference. The organisers expect to provide accommodation and reimbursement of travel expenses for participants although we might ask for a contribution towards overseas airfares.

Timeline

1st June 2012	Deadline for abstract submissions
1st July 2012	Notification of accepted abstracts
1st December 2012	Deadline for submission of full paper
13th-15th February 2013	Conference, SOAS

Organizers

The conference is part of the research project *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Between Empire and Nation-State*, jointly funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the German Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. This event is convened by Nelida Fuccaro (SOAS) and Rasmus Christian Elling (University of Copenhagen / SOAS).