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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: Toward a New Direction in Conceptualizing Mobility: A Multidisciplinary Perspective

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s:

PRESENTERS: ISSAM NASSAR (PROGRAM OF HISTORY), TARIQ DAANA (PROGRAM OF CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN STUDIES), FARAH Z. ARIDI (PROGRAM OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE) – DOHA INSTITUTE FOR GRADUATE STUDIES

CHAIR: FRANCESCA BIANCANI (UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA)

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

It is the commitment of this panel to approach intellectual debates and concerns, not only from an interdisciplinary perspective, but also from a comparative lens. Keeping in line with our critical positionality as researchers writing from the Middle East, about the Middle East, with reservations that we can explore later about the usage of the term itself, we adhere to a political and intellectual commitment to question, reflect, and assess the conceptual language within which we write and toward which we aim to produce not only an intellectual and academic discourse, but most importantly knowledge. Amidst the current advancements and technological, artificial, and non-human agentive crossings, movements and hybridization, in addition to ideological, ideational, and disciplinary perspectives that are becoming once again normative within academia, we are committed to an understanding and practice of a research-work that reflects where we choose to position ourselves vis-à-vis understanding “mobility”, each within, across, and beyond our different disciplines and fields of study.

Issues pertaining to mobility, movement, and crossing are already aspects of our research complicated within our critical positionality in the fields of knowledge pertaining to History, Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, and Comparative Literature. However, and amidst the ongoing context of genocide, war, displacement, and immigration, such issues are necessarily complicated within and beyond the normative spectrum of war, neoliberalism, technological advancements, and market culture. Despite not necessarily working on present contexts, our approach adheres to our commitment illustrated briefly above. We view the past, not as a past that has passed, as Paul Ricoeur would say, but as an extension to our present context. For this reason, it is necessary to briefly allude to both the politics and the philosophy behind our research, which we hope we would be able to translate into a practice and a knowledge production.

Prior to illustrating the various trajectories that our panel seeks to open up and unpack, it is pertinent to briefly lay out our theoretical framing and inclinations that inform our presentation and commitment here. Our approach aims to defy political, conceptual, and intellectual binarisms, moving through (but beyond) a Hegelian dialectic to a more defiant reading. We aim to articulate the power of discursive crossings, whether ideological, human, historical, or that of socio-spatial narratives (as we shall explain briefly in what follows). We commit to a humanist and critical reflection against monolithic representations of narratives of crossings and movement, away from victimization on the one hand, sanctification and resilience that only produce abstract potentialities and possibilities, on the other, and in another direction, against the marginalization of such crossings within the Eurocentric classifications of center-periphery.

We understand movement here, on a conceptual level, as a generator of meaning, intellectual potentialities, and critical possibilities that would inform a production of knowledge suitable within the proposed framework above. Our reading approach adheres to constant practices of reflection and questioning that aim to re-conceptualize mobility, movement, and the spaces such mobility inhabits, traverses, crosses, and changes. Movement is thus seen not only as a producer of meaning, but a product of it, not only a producer of power, but a product of it. Within the framework of knowledge and power, influenced by conceptualizations such as Michel Foucault's¹, on these two concepts, in addition to his work on discourse and discursive practices, we follow Tim Cresswell's² conceptualization of movement as pertaining to three levels/aspects: 1. As socially produced; 2. As ideological and representational strategies; 3. As an everyday lived experience that is practiced and embodied.

From within this specific framework, Farah Z. Aridi's paper will focus on discursive practices of socio-spatial crossings. The main objective that her paper seeks to contribute is the need for a reconceptualization of narratives of crossings, movement, and mobility, specifically through those advanced by texts. In other words, she is concerned with questioning writings on cities through the investigation of the crossings/movements of both city and text. What can we know about city experience when we write about it from a forced distance? What becomes of the city, across generated socio-spatial modalities, through the experience of "moving away"? What exactly is displaced in writing when we write on account of forced movement? How do we perceive non-forced movement following such violence of forced mobility? What happens to the conceptualization of practices such as walking in the city, under contexts in which walking is no longer optional, a luxury, functional, or even permissible? What happens to this conceptualization when walking becomes violently forced?

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1989); Michel Foucault, *Poewr/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980)

² Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (London: Routledge: 2006); Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman (eds), *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011)

Tariq Daana's paper takes on violent crossings from within the Palestinian context.

The Abraham Accords, which formalized the alignment between Israel and some Arab countries, have significantly impacted the geopolitical and security landscape of the Arab World and the broader Middle East, particularly in terms of weapon transfers. The United States (US) orchestrated the agreement, which was signed by Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain in 2020, with Morocco and Sudan following suit. While the accords have been portrayed in mainstream circles as a milestone in Arab-Israeli relations and a beacon of hope for peace, stability, and prosperity, their true intentions are closely tied to the expansion of military capabilities and the transfer of weapons in the region. Rather than resolving regional conflicts or promoting genuine peace, the Accords have allowed Israel to expand its sphere of influence and leverage its military superiority. In return, Arab countries have sought to gain access to Israeli military technology and expertise, which have been developed over decades of violent colonial endeavors in Palestine. This exchange of military knowledge and equipment has further fueled the militarization and securitization of the region, thereby increasing the likelihood of regional conflict and instability.

Issam Nassar's paper is concerned with the history of photography as a form of mobility. The advent of photography, along with increased travel throughout the Mediterranean, facilitated interactions among diverse shores, introducing images and narratives depicting life, locales, and cultures that had previously been only imagined within the European sphere. His research seeks to explore and unpack how traveling Europeans represented the eastern Mediterranean through both visual and textual mediums, and how these representations contributed to the construction of an "Imaginaire" of the East, significantly impacting the subsequent colonization of certain regions in the aftermath of World War I (1914-1918).

The various trajectories undertaken by this panel "move" along the potentialities of producing knowledge about and of movement and mobility that transcends the experience of movement/mobility, to exploring issues that might ensue as a result, to investigating formative and informative knowledges that such experiences engender, to a conceptualizing and reconceptualisation of various aspects of mobility, crossings, bordering, and othering. We aim through the multidisciplinary of our panel to demonstrate links, relations, and connections pertinent to knowledge production from within our context and the critical positionality that our theoretical framing helps set. We are keen to bridge through not only our disciplines, but also to undertake a movement from the theoretical to the practical by shedding light on how these two aspects of knowledge production and meaning-making not only inform one another, but form one another as well. Our commitment to making our theoretical inclinations align with our academic, intellectual, and political praxis is demonstrated through our reading approach which we exemplified in this proposal.

Papers

“Peace” as an Arms Deal

Tariq Dana

Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

Abstract

This article scrutinizes the Abraham Accords and their transformative impact on the Middle East's security landscape. The Accords do not aim at achieving peace, but paradoxically forge new security and military alliances that escalate regional militarization. They also serve as a strategic tool for the US to reposition itself amidst shifting global dynamics and declining interventionist tendencies. As one consequence, they stimulate an upsurge in militarized diplomacy and arms sales, deeply integrating Israeli interests within US-Arab relations. By diverting attention from key conflict triggers like the Israeli colonization of Palestine and Arab authoritarianism, these agreements also reinforce the counterrevolutionary alliance of Arab autocracies and Israeli settler-colonialism. However, the Abraham Accords face formidable challenges, including persistent Palestinian resistance and regional engagement by other global powers like China. Far from delivering peace, the Abraham Accords may well destabilize the region further.

Keywords

Abraham Accords, Middle East, Militarization, Arab-Israeli normalization, Palestine, Great Power Competition.

Toward a Mobile Theorisation Act: Understanding and Spatialising Moving Concepts

Farah Z. Aridi

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the theoretical act, considering it in itself a practice in transit. Springing from the conviction of the inseparability of the theoretical and the practical, this paper is interested in the need to reconceptualize narratives of crossings, movement, and mobility. The main objectives of this paper is to engage with questioning writings on/of crossings/movements within their social, political, discursive, and ideological implications. More specifically, this paper is interested in “walking” as an example that it seeks to complicate under conditions of violence. some of the questions that this paper entertains include: What can we know about the experience of movement when we write about it from a forced distance? What becomes of this practice, across generated socio-spatial modalities, through the experience of “moving away”? What exactly is displaced in writing when we write on account of forced movement? How do we perceive non-forced movement following such violence of forced mobility, and can both these experiences inform one another? What happens to the conceptualization of practices such as walking in the city, under contexts in which walking is no longer optional, a luxury, functional, or permissible? What happens to this conceptualization when walking becomes violently forced?

Keywords

Walking, Movement, Mobility, Violence, Theoretical Act, Praxis, Narrative

Issam Nassar

Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

Abstract

The paper explores European perceptions of Palestine in the 19th century through the lens of photography and travelogues. It delves into how European travelers represented Palestine visually and textually, contributing to the construction of an "Imaginaire" of the East. The presentation discusses how European colonial ambitions and Eurocentric biases influenced the depiction of Palestine as steeped in biblical history rather than reflecting its contemporary reality. The emergence of photography revolutionized historical preservation but also allowed for the manipulation of scenes to fit Eurocentric narratives. Early photographs often omitted human figures or marginalized them, perpetuating the narrative of Palestine as an ancient, uninhabited land awaiting Western reclamation. Despite the influx of European visitors and advancements like the steam engine, Palestine was often perceived as resistant to modernization. Staged studio portraits exoticized Palestinian culture but lacked authenticity, reinforcing European preconceptions. These photographs, along with travelogues, shaped European perceptions of Palestine and contributed to colonial interests in the region. Understanding the complexities of early photography in Palestine requires considering historical and social contexts, illuminating prevailing attitudes within the European imagination.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

Tariq Dana is an Associate Professor and the head of the Conflict and Humanitarian Studies Program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He serves as Associate editor of Middle East Critique and a policy advisor for Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network.

Farah Z. Aridi is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, in Qatar. Her teaching and research interests include Comparative Literature, Literary theory, Spatial-Literary Studies, Socio-spatial justice, as well as City literature and narratives and spatial life writing.

Issam Nassar is professor of Modern Middle East cultural history with an interest in visual culture, in particular photography. Dr Nassar is the Chair of the History program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies and an emeritus professor of History at Illinois State University. He has authored a number of books, as well as co-authored or edited others. The latest being: *Camera Palaestina: Photography and Displaced Histories of Palestine*, co-authored with Stephen Sheehi and Salim Tamari (University of California Press, 2022). Other books include: *Tarikh al Falastiniyyeen wa Harakatuhum al-Wataniyah* [History of Palestinians and Their National Movement], co-authored with Maher Charif (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2018); *Laqatat mughayira: al-tasweer al-fotografi al-mubaker fi filastin 1850-1948* [Different Snapshots: Early Local Photography in Palestine 1850-1948], (Beirut: Kutub Publishing, 2005); *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904-1948*, edited, annotated and introduced with Salim Tamar (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2013); *I Would Have Smiled: Photographing the Palestinian*

Refugee Experience, co-edited with Rasha Salti (Jerusalem: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009); and *Dirasat fi al-tarikh al-ijtima'i libilad al-Sham* [Studies in the Social History of the Levant], co-edited with Salim Tamari (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2007), among others.

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