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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

**TITOLO/TITLE:** From Jerusalem to Beirut: Contextualizing Uneven Transformations

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**LINGUE/LANGUAGES:** Inglese/English

**PANEL:** Chiuso/Closed

**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):**

**From Jerusalem to Beirut:  
Contextualizing Uneven Transformations**

The proposed panel will explore multiple aspects of the Arab city, focusing particularly on three Levantine cities: Beirut, Jerusalem, and Ramallah. It embraces multidisciplinary approach to understanding a variety of multifaceted, yet subtle, dynamics that have profoundly reshaped the political, cultural, and socioeconomic structures of major cities in Palestine and Lebanon. The spatio-politics of the Arab city is governed by repressive and complex power dynamics, which define social relations and political realms along the lines of inequalities, injustices, and divisions. Be it dominated by sectarianism and constant crisis as in the case of Beirut, or settler-colonial domination as in Jerusalem, or a combination of colonialism and neoliberal restructuring as in Ramallah, the reality of these urban spaces is one of grievance, but also of resistance and counter-hegemony. The following abstracts present different epistemological and critical perspectives to explain how urban dynamics are stimulated by uneven sociocultural transformations and tense political contestations.

**Re-inscribing the Urban Imaginary // Seeing the Arab City**

**Farah Z. Aridi**

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This paper is preoccupied with the idea of writing the city following three main trajectories: the socio-spatial imaginary of the city (cultural, intellectual, and literary imaginary of the city); the act of seeing the city (with attention given to the specificity of the Arab city despite the multiple city genres within the Arab context); and finally the act of writing/reading/experiencing the city. All three culminate in, and feed into, one another. The paper moves along these point emulating the process of experiencing the city itself as a walker in de Certeau's conceptualisation of walking as an everyday socio-spatial practice, in an

attempt to write it down.

On the first level, I focus on issues of socio-spatial justice (including the right to the city, the right to be in the city, and more specifically the right to be political in the city). The right to the city here opens questions into which bodies are allowed space and which are marginalised. Questioning the order(ing), social and spatial, of the city allows room to rethink and revise grand city narratives, expose restrictive and dominant power orders, and re-evaluate city spaces, their functionalities, their power dynamics, and their bio-political hold over selective bodies. On the second level, I am interested in challenging the rigidity of concepts themselves, including that of the city, in an attempt to call attention to what I call city genres in references to the multiple of kinds of city within the same context (here, the Arab city). Falling on the specificity of the Arab city, and the various types of city (conceptual), I will take Beirut as an example of a city genre. The aim is to lean on the first level aforementioned, contextualising the act of seeing the city from within an interplay of power dynamics, exposing not only the kind of body looking out (seeing), but also the kind of gaze employed, and positionality of the said body within the power order specific to the context chosen. The third and final level is a call to revise the way we talk, speak about, theorise, discuss, read, and write our cities. Especially within the context of cities in conflict, taking space intellectually, creatively, spatially, and discursively is a step forward toward creating an alternative mode of seeing, reading, writing, and talking about the city, a mode that allows for alternative narratives often absented, marginalised, or left out, to come to the fore — to engage politically.

In keeping true to the specificity of Beirut, as a city genre within the Arab context, this paper veers away from overusing the word ‘crisis’ — as part of an approach to revisit dominant discursive, conceptual, and theoretical moulds and frameworks often the byproduct of biopolitics or an orientalist gaze. I seek to rethink the way we view the city in conflict within its own socio-spatial context and historic-political conditions. This also includes the way we imagine the city, the way we theorise and talk about our city, the discourse we adopt, the outlook, the gaze, the way we perform our bodies in the spaces of the city (the way we move), among others. This attempt focuses on city narratives that carry the weight of three events and their ongoing effects that have taken place in the Lebanese capital, Beirut: the 17 Oct. 2019 uprising, the 4 Aug. 2020 Beirut Port explosion, and the current hyperinflation and economic situation.

## **Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of a Cultural Center**

**Issam Nassar**

**Doha Institute for Graduate Studies**

My contribution will examine the modern history of Jerusalem, with a focus on its social history, from the late Ottoman period into its partition and division in 1948. The transformation of the city from a small town in early 19<sup>th</sup> century with a small population and fame related mostly to its religious significance into a capital of an Ottoman district, or *mutassarifiyeh*, in the second half of the century only to emerge as the capital city of Palestine under the rule of the British. Major changes and transformations were taking place during this period including

massive modernization projects and an enhance position as a capital sending representatives to the Ottoman parliament in Istanbul. With the establishment of a city council around 1870, major infrastructure projects were undertaken, including paving the streets, and providing them with lights; brining running water to the city; new hospitals and schools, as well as spread of café culture. The city grew with new houses and neighborhoods emerging outside its historic walls, bring with them a new suburban bourgeoisie culture.

With Jerusalem's emergence as the capital of British Mandate Palestine, it was quick to become the center of political power, not only to the British but to the emerging Arab nationalist movement. Conferences, protests and other political activities soon appeared in the city, and new social classes started to appear on the scene. Festive events, including musical and cultural events, were being seen alongside the religious festivities of the past. Visit by famous artists, such as Um Kulthum and Mohammad Abdelwahhab from Egypt, Badia Massabni from Lebanon, along with poets from Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere became common in the city. New movies theaters, cultural cafes and saloons, schools and collages were dominating the city's social and cultural landscape. Muslims, Christian and Jews participated in these events and contributed to the making of a cultural metropolis of the city.

However, all such signs of modernity came to a halt with the colonization of the western Part of the city in 1948 by the Zionist forces and the expulsion of the more than thirty thousand residents from that section, along with the Jordanian control of the eastern section. The city was no longer the cultural hub it was, with Amman replacing it as the political capital and Tel Aviv as the cultural one on both sides of the divide.

My paper will examine the rise and fall of Jerusalem as a cultural center before its partition. Using memoirs, diaries, and photographs, I will illustrate the grave loss of a cultural symbol and its return to a mere holy city as a result of the war events.

### **A city in conflict: the dynamic of colonialism and neoliberalism in Ramallah**

**Tariq Dana**

**Doha Institute for Graduate Studies**

Modern-day Ramallah has captured the interest and imagination of many researchers since the city has massively (urbanely and demographically) grown over the past three decades. Unlike most Palestinian cities that are rooted in ancient history, Ramallah is no more than two centuries old. Yet it is now the center of Palestinian politics, capital, and culture. This paper argues that contemporary Ramallah is a byproduct of overlapping processes: colonialism and neoliberalism.

Ramallah resembles capitals yet without a state; it is the center of the Palestinian Authority and on its outskirts lies the headquarters of the Israeli military administration in the West Bank. Whereas Israeli restrictions on the spatial growth of Palestinian urban spaces have limited the

expansion of Ramallah, the internationally backed PA and its associated businesses have promoted a cruel neo-liberal transformation of the city, encouraging unproductive sectors, consumerism and personal debts.

This paper will examine how, in a paradoxical way, the political economy of Ramallah is one that aims at political stabilization under the ongoing colonization

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