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Transforming Memories: Cultural Production and Personal/Public Memory in Lebanon and Morocco. Beirut: Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin; UMAM Documentation and Research, Beirut, 12.03.2012-14.03.2012.

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Transforming Memories: Cultural Production and Personal/Public Memory in Lebanon and Morocco

"Transforming Memories: Cultural Production and Personal/Public Memory in Lebanon and Morocco" is a research project initiated by Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin, in partnership with UMAM Documentation and Research in Beirut, Lebanon. The project is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. The research team consists of Dr. Sonja Hegasy, Vice-Director of ZMO, and Monika Borgmann and Lokman Slim, Directors of UMAM. There are three subprojects: Dr. Saadi Nikro, "Sites of ReMemory: Situating Cultural Production and Civil War in Lebanon"; Laura Menin, "Wounded Memories: An Ethnographic Approach to Contemporary Moroccan Cultural Production"; and Makram Rabah, "Memory and Reconciliation: Conflict on Mount Lebanon".

The three subprojects share an interdisciplinary and comparative interest in cultural production as sites in which personal and public practices of memory overlap through avenues of social exchange. Morocco and Lebanon are exceptional in that for at least 20 years their respective public cultures are characterised by energetic and experimental forms of cultural production that creatively engage violent pasts as a terrain of dialogue on how to co-exist in the present and future. From a multidisciplinary perspective – including history, Islamic studies, literary and cultural studies, political science and cultural anthropology – the project addresses memory as transformative sites and practices in which past and present are situated as shifting boundaries of personal and public signification, affiliation, and conflict.

The project formally began in January 2012, and runs till the end of 2013. The March workshop brought together the participants to inaugurate the project. It was held at the headquarters of UMAM Documentation and Research in Beirut, in their exhibition space "The Hangar".

In the first session on the first day of the workshop MONIKA BORGMANN (Beirut) presented UMAM—its beginning, its various activities and projects, past and present. The idea of setting up UMAM came about during Borgmann's collaboration with her partner and co-director LOKMAN SLIM (Beirut) in the film-project *Massaker* (2003), which documented the testimonies of six perpetrators involved in the September, 1982 massacres at the Sabra at Chatila Palestinian refugee camps. It was indeed during the filming that they realized that Lebanon was lacking systematic and accessible archives. Developing their mutual interest in violence and memory related to the civil war (1975-1990), they set up UMAM in 2005 and initiated various projects involving artists, researchers, NGOs and human rights activists, as well as local communities. As Borgmann said, "every society has to deal with its past"; and thus, they started collecting, archiving and documenting, testimonies of witnesses, victims and perpetrators.

According to UMAM's founders, if the state neglects the memory of the war, the role of NGOs is to work towards initiating and nurturing debates and discussions on the past and present. The activities of UMAM developed in a rapidly shifting political context, marked by the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri (2005), the war with Israel in 2006, and the increased tension amongst the various communities. When their offices in Haret Hreik were heavily damaged by the Israeli bombardement in 2006, they concentrated on the creation of an archive by digitalizing, storing and cataloging literature, periodicals, newspapers, audio and video materials, propaganda flyers and other items. By now 56,000 pages have been digitalized, and copies of the files have

been transferred to Finland in order to secure the material from any further damage.

As Borgmann pointed out, the Summer war of 2006 brought about some critical reflections on UMAM's role or "mission". Devoted to the work of memory, UMAM thus developed as an activist and archivist NGO undertaking various community and artistic projects. Amongst other public events, *What is to be Done: Lebanon's War-Loaded Memory* (2008) aimed to arouse a debate about Lebanon's memory of the war. This project – which included film screenings, publications, exhibitions and a workshop with international experts – aspired to reflect upon the contribution of art, cultural production and research to engage the work of memory. According to Borgmann, the Lebanese state's granting of amnesty as a formal political policy hasn't succeeded in a context of ongoing violence and increasing tensions.

In the second session Borgmann and Lokman Slim talked about their current project *Memory at Work: A Guide for Lebanese on Peace and War.* `http://www.memoryatwork.org` (09.10.2012). This is a website that works as a data-base, offering a largely untold day-by-day chronology of the war through compilations of print material from newspapers and other publications, as well as many visuals. So far UMAM has documented the years from 1975 to 1978, and is working to develop this further. The site is also a unique archive of works of cultural production relating to war and violence in Lebanon.

In the third session UMAM's curator AMANDA ABI KHALIL (Beirut) presented the activities and exhibitions of the Hangar, which has its own website. Activities include film screenings and exhibitions, and are linked to the archival work of UMAM. One such activity is a residency program that artists can apply for, engaging and creatively constructing artworks that draw on the archives. Other activities involve workshops with children from the surrounding suburbs and refugee camps.

In the fourth and last session of the day SARI HANAFI (Beirut), from the American University of Beirut, gave a talk on the theme of transitional justice, providing a comparative analysis of various experiences worldwide.

In the first session on Tuesday SONJA HEGASY (Berlin) gave an introduction to the field of memory studies. She emphasized the visibility and attention memory studies has gained in the last twenty years, thus leading some authors to talk of a "memory boom". By considering the various tangents of memory research in respect to autobiographical, collective, cultural, communicative, social and political memory, Hegasy noted that the various definitions and approaches elaborated in the different fields of the humanities, psychoanalysis and bio-cognitive sciences have made it difficult for researchers to cross disciplinary boundaries. And yet in Germany scholars tend to agree that memory is always communicative; while the difference between collective and communicative memory is not necessarily accepted by much recent research.

Hegasy pointed out that in the Arab World memory studies has significantly increased over the last three to four years in the attempt to answer the question: why do most states relive periods of immense violence over and over again? She noted that it remains an open question whether conflicts can be better overcome through the imperative of 'forgive and forget' or by remembering and judicial prosecution. In such processes the victim should have some say in how they are formally received and represented.

In the second session SAADI NIKRO (Berlin) spoke about trauma and voice. Pointing out that trauma can be studied as a relational circumstance in which people engage various capacities to manage social exchange, he suggested that silence can be regarded as one modality in which this takes place. In such terms, the situational register of trauma can be further considered in respect to a social ethic in which nurture and care can be distributed and allocated through political and public culture. He compared memory in Lebanon to that of Spain, in respect to civil war and its belated register in cultural production and general public debate. In doing so he canvassed a critical application of "post-memory", particularly in respect to a younger generation of Lebanese bearing the burden of their parents' silence over the civil war and its restless aftermath.

In the third session LAURA MENIN (Berlin) presented her subproject on Morocco. Starting with a testimony of a Moroccan feminist activist on her political engagement in the student movement in the early 1980s, Menin talked of the Years of Lead in Morocco – a historical phase marked by the systematic and violent repression of all opposition political forces during the reign of Hassan II (1961-1999). Since the changed political climate in Morocco fostered by Mohammed VI (1999), political activists and former political prisoners, as well as filmmakers and writers, have told significant (hi)stories to their audiences both in Morocco and abroad. Yet, Menin notes, there is a need to explore the ways in which Moroccan people engage with these (hi)stories to discuss

their present, re-mold their past and imagine their future. What is the role of cultural production in shaping transformative sites of memory? How do films, fictions and autobiographies contribute to re-orienting people's imagination, memory and agency? Through an ethnographic approach to cultural production, circulation and audience, Menin's sub-project aims to uncover the multiple ways in which people in Morocco engage with public culture and its politics of memory.

In the fourth session MAKRAM RABAH (Washington-Beirut) presented his subproject "Memory and Reconciliation: Conflict on Mount Lebanon". He spoke about the social background to the ongoing debate about the memory of the Lebanese civil war. Rabah began his talk with a small clip See <http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?~ID=160598> (09.10.2012). to shed light on this question. On April 13, 2010, the Lebanese government unprecedentedly commemorated the 35th anniversary of the start of the civil war. The venue for this unorthodox celebration was a soccer pitch which hosted two teams, one representing the Lebanese cabinet captained by the Prime Minister and the other made up of members of the Lebanese Parliament. While the Lebanese may well be amused by the sight of their less than-fit politicians running around on the turf, the post-game press statements revealed the crux of the debate vis-a-vis the remembrance of the civil war. When asked about the purpose of this media stunt, one MP eloquently summarized the state's timid approach to the remembrance of the war by forthrightly declaring: "we are not here to remember the civil war, but we are here to forget it". Rabah spoke in detail about the primary and secondary sources available for his research, which primarily focuses on oral history while at the same time relies on a wide array of primary and secondary sources available through UMAM's archives.

In the fifth and last session that day ALI ABU DEHN (Beirut), a former political prisoner in Syria for 13 years, addressed the participants. He talked about how during the civil war, in 1987, he was imprisoned by the Syrians with the charge of spying for Israel, apprehended as he travelled to Damascus to finalize his emigration papers to Australia. He spoke about the torture and deprivations he suffered, and how the arbitrary and systematic violation of his body pursued by his torturers worked to annihilate him as a subject. Upon his release, he went back to his wife and two children, without any form of support and care from the Lebanese government. Since he started recovering, Abu Dehn began to speak out on the plight of Lebanese political prisoners in Syrian jails, and initiated an NGO, called Former Lebanese Political Detainees in Syria. The website http://www.flpdinsyria.com/?~q=node/ (09.10.2012). gives accounts of his and others' experiences in Syrian prisons, a section on press reports, and registers the names of former political prisoners, as well as those that remain unaccounted for.

In the first session on Wednesday participants held a working meeting to discuss the project's overall objectives and practices, and considered points of comparison between Lebanon and Morocco. One of these points concerned the comparative theme of the Moroccan state's truth and equity commission and the lack of a similar initiative in Lebanon. Participants agreed that such commissions were not unproblematic, and that more concrete research on the social and cultural aspects of memory work was needed in both countries.

In the second session Lokman Slim talked about "Memory Politics in Lebanon". Slim pointed out that while in Lebanon the theme and issue of memory remains highly contested across and between communities, there is nevertheless a common propensity to mythologize the past. He suggested that Lebanese politics should be more attuned to modernization, rather than mythologization. He pointed out that the Hariri assassination in 2005 broke the taboo on amnesty regarding politically motivated violence, and the subsequent UN sponsored tribunal to bring the perpetrators to justice has at least brought about the possibility of a more accountable governmental practice in Lebanon.

In summary, the workshop provided a valuable opportunity for the participants to meet and hear from each other. It was particularly fruitful to compare and discuss methodologies and research frameworks, as well as gain insight into the overall project's research practices. A further project workshop is planned for 2013, to be held in Morocco.

Conference Overview:

Day One

Session 1: Monika Borgmann (Beirut), Presentation of UMAM

Session 2: Monika Borgmann and Lokman Slim (Beirut), Memory at Work

Session 3: Amanda Abi Khalil (Beirut), The Hangar: Arts and Archives

Session 4: Sari Hanafi (Beirut), Transitional Justice

Day Two

Session 1: Sonja Hegasy (Berlin), Introduction to Memory Studies

Session 2: Saadi Nikro (Berlin), Sites of ReMemory: Situating Cultural Production and Civil War in Lebanon

Session 3: Laura Menin (Berlin), Wounded Memories: An Ethnographic Approach to Contemporary Moroccan Cultural Production

Session 4: Makram Rabah (Washington-Beirut), Memory and Reconciliation: Conflict on Mount Lebanon

Session 5: Ali Abu Dehn (Beirut), Political Prisoners in Syria

Day Three

Session 1 : Round Table Discussion, Project Objectives and Practices

Session 2: Lokman Slim, Memory Politics in Lebanon

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http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/

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