Aya Nassar

Title:

**Spaces of Power:**

**Politics, subjectivity and materiality in post-independence Cairo**

Abstract:

This thesis works across the intersection of political geography, urban studies, and Middle East politics. It develops approaches from material geography, narrative IR, and post-colonial thought to investigate the production of space in post-independence Cairo. My project is set against a prevalent conception of the city in studies of politics as a passive space, with a linear history. Instead the research asks: how does the city becomes implicated in the political ordering of post-independence Egypt? and it seeks to critically inhabit and unpick the politics of this layering of differential orders and logics: colonialism, to decolonialization, open door-policy and neoliberalism.

The project depends on archival research in Egypt, as well as the UK. I use collections of Egyptian architects that remain largely untapped, and re-read some of the frequently used archives through the prism of the materiality of space and built environment. In this thesis 'Fire', 'Mud', 'Cement', ‘Water’ and 'Dust' are deployed as key material/metaphoric elements of space that have acted on the politics of de-colonialization, nationalism, modernity, and neoliberalism in the decades following independence. Ultimately the research argues that attuning to the materiality that literally make and break urban space can offer visceral accounts of the subjectivity of the city-dwellers, and the researcher herself. My project contributes to understanding of the spatial politics of the Middle East. It proposes to traverse a materiality-representational debate in postcolonial studies by becoming attuned to the materiality of the making and unmaking of urban space.