

CFP: 8th International Conference on Popular Cultures of the Middle East and North Africa - Popular Culture between Site and Flow

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Call for Papers

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The Giorgi Tsereteli Oriental Institute at Ilia State University in collaboration with The University of Vienna and Al Akhwayn University (Morocco) are pleased to invite contributions to **the 8th International Conference on Popular Cultures of the Middle East and North Africa: Popular Culture between Site and Flow**, to be held in Tbilisi Georgia from 28 to 30 September 2017.

Throughout history, the geography now corresponding to the country of Georgia has been an important crossroad for flows of people between East and West. For hundreds of years, its capital Tbilisi has been a dynamic site for the meeting, exchange, and consumption of local and travelling popular cultures. Inspired by the dynamic flows of people and ideas through Georgia and the rich history of its capital as an important site of cultural production and intercultural exchange, we invite research proposals for the 8th International Conference of Popular Culture of the Middle East and North Africa that interrogate ideas of “site” and “flow.”

Since the advent of British cultural studies, the notion of the importance of popular culture as a site of social struggle has proved a rich foundation for ethnographic cultural exploration and analysis around the world. This has been especially true of popular culture of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as the shifting landscapes of revolution, counterrevolution, and occupation continue to color the political lenses through which the region and its cultures are both experienced and understood. The notion of Arab, Iranian, Turkish, and regional minority popular and youth cultures as expressions of resistance, sites of struggle, and processes of radical deliberation have been important frameworks for understanding politics in MENA pop-cultural production.

At the same time that this widespread use of cultural critical theory imagines popular culture as the *site* or terrain of struggle, large parts of the MENA are today confronted with the reality of building

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or maintaining culture on the move. In recent years, the spectacular migrations out of and across the MENA dramatize demographic *flows* as perhaps the central current in contemporary regional reality. The materiality of these patterns of movement have brought new considerations of precarity and violence, as well as new definitions of diaspora, migration, and exchange to the study of the contemporary MENA cultural production. New scholarship has begun to show the promising relevance of media and performance theories of “flow” to understand emergent forms of popular cultural production in the MENA region and its relation to socio-political processes.

In what ways can or should the idea of popular culture as the site or terrain of social struggle be adapted to account for the significant patterns of contemporary movement of MENA peoples? Or alternatively, in what ways are the spectacular demographic flows towards, through, and away from the region leading to the fetishization of movement, hybridity, and exchange in MENA cultural production? How can the study and documentation of popular culture help to ease this destabilizing movement? As the terrain shifts hypothetically, politically, and literally under the feet of MENA denizens, how will the study of MENA popular culture adapt? How to imagine the shifting terrain of contemporary MENA popular culture production as flow? Or how can the dynamic flows of people, ideas, and capital be imagined as the new terrain of MENA popular culture?

We invite papers that investigate these questions and related ones - research that may address the following aspects of cinema, film, street theatre, comedy, poetry, press, digital media, dance, games, folklore, music, storytelling, and television of the MENA region and its diasporas:

- MENA cultural influences in the Caucasus and cultural influences from the Caucasus in the MENA;
- Cultural production on the move;
- Travelling troupes, performers, products; notions of transnational popularity and consumption;
- Popular culture in translation;
- Globalization and adaptation;
- Authenticity and tradition in the face of cultural exchange;
- Transnational and interregional networks (satellite media, social media, activism, among others);
- Popular/cultural hubs and horizons; soundscapes, “food”scapes
- Diasporic audiences; migrant consumers; refugee producers (and variations within);
- Affective flows within MENA cultural production;
- Spatial dynamics of MENA cultural production;
- “Flows” of cognition in pop cultural consumption;
- Performative “flow” as experience by popular MENA singers, performers, storytellers;
- “Sites” of cultural production/struggle/resistance;
- Pop-cultural sedimentation and fixing.

Please submit abstracts of 250-300 words in English to menapoptbilisi@gmail.com by **1 March 2017**. Authors of successful abstracts will be notified by 1 April. We welcome presentations based on research in any of the diverse languages of the MENA, but please note that due to technical limitations, the sole language of the conference will be English. Only abstracts in English will be

considered. Inquiries welcomed at the address above.

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