

Middle East – Topics & Arguments
Call for Papers
Infrastructure

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The peer-reviewed online journal “Middle East – Topics & Arguments” (META) is calling for submissions for its tenth issue on the topic of “**Infrastructure**”.

Infrastructure points to the ultimate conceptual debates of social science; it highlights the strong connections between material things, lives, and practice with immaterial and ideational aspects of human life. Furthermore, infrastructural matters like pipes, dams, walls, grids, cables, etc. reveal and, even more so, complicate the relationship between nature and humanity. We believe that studying infrastructure leads to new horizons of understanding people’s socio-political, moral and affective worlds and how they relate to conceptions of nature. Infrastructure as the topic for the tenth issue of Middle East – Topics & Arguments (META) offers a variety of conceptual approaches from many disciplines, such as history, anthropology, sociology, political science, cultural studies, media studies and economics (among others), as the topic connects the research on practices of everyday life with questions of planning, state politics and local and global neoliberal developments. Further, Infrastructure provides an interesting departure point to study the material entanglements of infrastructure with modes of its facilitation and representation.

Infrastructures, such as transportation, energy and water networks, facilitate everyday life, while at the same time rupture it at any given moment. They assemble all kinds of actors and agents once they are brought into being. As manifestations of diverging interests, infrastructures are always bound with relations of power and domination. They hence do not only embody and reproduce power relations, but also engender sites of resistance and subversion in times of social crises. These understandings of infrastructures will help us to study them as much more than technological accomplishments of the present, but rather as cultural semiotics that are deeply embedded in everyday politics and social relations.

For this META issue, we are looking for submissions that not only interrogate infrastructural networks as spatial arrangements that lay out social organization, but also look back into the temporality of infrastructures: histories of colonialism and imperialism that once shaped Middle Eastern and North African societies and the post/neo-colonial continuations of material networks that facilitate and control communities.

From the symbolic meanings to its material effects, its embeddedness in everyday politics and role in negotiations of power and resistance, infrastructures are indeed the key point for scrutinizing technological and developmental progress, neoliberalism and modernity at large. We welcome abstracts for proposed articles from scholars that employ infrastructure as a key conceptual instrument in understanding and researching commonalities and differences of the political, social and cultural worlds in the Middle East. Some suggested themes are:

- **Infrastructural Histories**

The tendency to consider infrastructural systems as timeless is a job half undone, and we welcome papers that discuss the ways in which the “life stories” of infrastructures are directly relevant to the emergence of not only modern nation-states, colonialism, and neoliberalism, but also political histories of post-colonial contexts in the MENA region.

- **States, Expertise and Politics of Infrastructure**

Infrastructural elements are what bind bodies, households and communities together. And sometimes they are what tear them apart. The public shapes and is shaped by these concrete and technical entities. A crucial aspect of how infrastructures are perceived is that they unveil the contested relations between the states and societies driven by power and exchange. We seek to understand the relational aspects of infrastructures; not only between state actors and their constituents, but also amongst the world of expertise – namely, the engineers, technicians, and workers who build, oversee, and manage these life structures and how they relate to the public sphere.

- **Infrastructures in Crisis: Rupture, Violence and Securitization**

Throughout the last decade, many spaces have become increasingly securitized and militarized. In “war zones” and in many urban settings all over the world, the role of security in times of “war against terror” has become paramount to urban planners, state institutions and private security firms. As public goods, infrastructures such as airports and buses, but also pipelines, etc., have become increasingly targeted by terror attacks, which has warranted constant intervention from state agencies and private security firms. The security of infrastructures often comes along with an increase in the application of infrastructures of security: constant surveillance, racial profiling, the use of drones and other intelligence means. Hence, infrastructures can be seen as specific spatial assemblages that reflect and manifest, but often also evade these efforts of securitization. The goal is to explore the ways in which infrastructures can not only be tools for securitization and surveillance in the hands of state and private actors, but also can be employed as spaces of dissidence that defy total control and can thus become spaces of resistance to (state) power.

- **Mobilities through space and time**

We welcome abstracts that focus on the key concept of *mobility* in regard to infrastructures of urban and rural spaces in the Middle East. At the heart of many struggles between city residents and their governments are not only inter-city/state highways and city transportation, but also the provision of services such as electricity, water and garbage collection. What is more is that this struggle heavily involves our natural surroundings and resources. Mobility has become a key term, not just with respect to the (in)ability to move from one place to another, but also in terms of social and cultural mobility. Here the goal is to contribute to the conceptualization of the mobility of people, goods, and resources through scrutinizing the use, manipulation of and negotiations around designing and facilitating these infrastructural systems.

Other themes that could be tackled under the umbrella of infrastructure could be:

- How does the planning, implementation and running of infrastructure affect the construction of gender roles and reflect the ongoing social construction and negotiation of public and private spaces?

- How can infrastructure be conceptualized with regard to its economic importance? Infrastructures are increasingly important when it comes to business investments all over the globe. As huge entities that create the need for human resources, expensive materials, time and capital, infrastructures reflect the global politics of capitalism and its asymmetric functioning. Not only in war-ridden areas such as Iraq, Libya and Syria, but also in other Middle Eastern countries, infrastructures are targeted as places that reflect the global economic dynamics. These technological systems create a network that enhance the reach of the global market. Keeping this in mind, how do the implementation, investment and privatization of infrastructures impact the global economic order that is manifested continuously in the Middle Eastern context?

We call for articles from a broad array of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, political science, literature studies, cultural studies, media studies, history and economics, which critically engage with concepts of infrastructure related to the MENA region, or which present new empirical findings

Submissions relating to the issue's focus topic are published in the FOCUS section and reflect original research. Articles in this section should be between 2,800 to 4,600 words. In addition to papers for the FOCUS section, we call for contributions for META's special sections: The CLOSE UP section features a short written portrait of a person who has a special relation to the issue's main topic, e.g. a researcher who has constitutively contributed to the field. It links that person's biography with their contribution to the field. Article length is 1,500 to 3,000 words.

The META section also relates to the issue's focus topic, with the papers in "meta" discussing the main topic from a theory-centered perspective. Regional scope is not limited to the Middle East, but may also consider theoretical approaches involving other world regions. Article length is 2,800 to 4,600 words.

The ANTI/THESIS section juxtaposes two rivaling positions that highlight different lines of argument, pros and cons, and/or competing narratives. These can be presented either by one author together, or by two different authors in two different articles. Article length for each paper is 1,500-3,000 words. All articles that fall into the general framework of the journal, but do not relate to the special topic "Infrastructure", will be taken into consideration for the OFF TOPIC section.

Prior to developing a complete manuscript, authors are asked to submit an abstract (300 words max.), a short CV (150 words max.), and 3-5 key bibliographic sources. Please clearly indicate the research question, the method to be used, and the empirical material your research will be based on. Papers are accepted in English only.

The editors will make a preliminary decision regarding the topic's relevance to the journal's aims and scope and may provide suggestions for developing the manuscript. Please consult our website for further information about the journal's concept, sections, and authors' guidelines.

The deadline for abstract submissions is June 15th 2017

The deadline for article submissions is September 30th 2017

Proposals, manuscripts and other editorial correspondence should be sent to: **submissions10@meta-journal.net**