


## Violence and the city in the modern Middle East

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To cite this article: Lamia Moghnieh (2016): Violence and the city in the modern Middle East, Contemporary Levant, DOI: [10.1080/20581831.2016.1227043](https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2016.1227043)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2016.1227043>

 Published online: 20 Sep 2016.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Violence and the city in the modern Middle East.** edited by Nelida Fuccaro, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2016, 312 pp., \$27.95 (paperback), ISBN-13: 9780804797528

The edited volume, *Violence and The City in the Modern Middle East*, offers a unique interdisciplinary contribution to the study of violence as contingent on urban sociality and space. Chapters in the volume range from historical and contemporary studies of cities such as Tunis, Jeddah, Kirkuk, Cairo and Abadan. Overall, the volume makes the case for grounding violence as being 'of the city' rather than in the city. Authors suggest that focusing on urban violence best captures the relationship between violence and space; the city is employed as an epistemological anchor from which to see and understand the nature and discourse of violence.

The book invites both students and scholars to rethink cities as localities that frame the distributions of power, population and sociality, producing specific kinds of conflict reflective of urban rupture and transformation. The book is divided thematically into four parts.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce some of the theoretical, methodological and ethical challenges of studying the theme of urban violence. Part II combines case studies on the norms and practices of urban violence. Chapter 3 looks at the violence of politics in early eighteenth-century Ottoman Cairo, offering a new reading of violence as part of normative politics in elite society. Chapter 4 focuses on the practice of *Mismar*, a famous Hijazi dance performed during celebrations and festivals in the nineteenth century. It looks at the crowd violence that erupted during these popular festivals in Jeddah's neighbourhoods, investigating the relationship between popular culture, quarter masculinity and urban violence. Chapter 5 looks at protests and riots in the cities of Jaffa, Haifa and Nablus carried by Palestinians during the British Mandate, and the changing discourse from non-violent protests to violence as a legitimate tool of resistance for rights and citizenship. It traces the discursive transformations in colonial violence as it sought to control urban populations.


Part III focuses on the geopolitical policies and projects unfolding in the city. Chapter 6 interprets the inter-communal clashes in Tunis between 1857 and 1864 as challenging Ottoman reforms on diversity and communal identity, calling for a new order of governance. Similarly, chapter 7 offers a new reading of the 1967 protests in Dhahran as 'an urban revolution' over international oil exploitation, local corrupt governance and urban impoverishment. Chapter 8 takes on the changing landscapes of securitization and militarization of cities in war by looking at Basra from the Iraq-Iran War in 1980, to the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, and the 1991 uprising.

Part IV explores city violence as a tactic and event of rupture and transformation in governance. Chapter 9 looks at the role of Baghdadi Jews in the 1946 Wathba that crystallized a new form of national solidarity in Iraq. Chapter 10 highlights how violence in colonial and early revolutionary Kirkuk transformed the ethno-nationalist politics of the city, showing how stories of violence during and after the events worked to produce validating narratives of civic and communal conflict. Chapter 11 recounts the oil workers' strike in 1946 Abadan as a fight for social-economic space by relying on 'the social club' as a site for violent encounters between socialist labourers and tribal Arabs. Finally, chapter 12 reads the 1952 Cairo fire in relation to the city's urban development and spatial politics, tracing the emerging urban reconstruction plans of the city after the revolution.

While the edited volume would primarily appeal to scholars of Middle Eastern history, it actively draws from various disciplines like sociology, urban studies, political theory and anthropology, and from cities in Europe, South Asia and Latin America, to provide a broader analysis of cities and violence beyond the Middle East. This approach serves to demystify stereotypical representations of the Middle East as intrinsically violent. It also engages in broader conversations on urban violence,

governance and resistance. The case studies seem to jump between time periods and cities, but the focus remains on reworking violence as contingent on urban space. However, this analysis begs for more work on the question of the spatial peripheries and margins of power in urban life, and their relationships to violence. While 'seeing like a city' predicated a somewhat uniform gaze on violence, teasing out more thoroughly the various peripheral practices, places and discourses in the city would further enrich the study of violence by adding a distinction for the situatedness of urban violence vis-a-vis the locus of power. Overall, *Violence and The City* offers new insights to current events from the Arab Spring revolutions and their repercussions on the region.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2016.1227043>