

What's in a Year? Reflections on 1967

Workshop at the Centre for Near-and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS), University of Marburg

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From 1913 to 1967, from 1066 to 1776: years constantly feature as titles of novels, popular academic works or research monographs. The marketability of such publications, their ability to capture the readers' imagination, rests on the fact that certain years have been marked out as significant. Yet, just how sure can we be about what a particular year 'signifies'? The year of 1945, when Europe was liberated from Nazi occupation saw the brutal crushing of another liberation movement in Algeria. The year of 1967, a watershed moment for many Arab intellectuals on the other hand is not much more than a 'prequel' to the events which unfolded across Europe and the US in 1968. We want to take these publications as a starting point to reflect on the role years play in structuring and producing knowledge in different fields of the arts, humanities and social sciences: How and why do certain years come to mark a moment where 'the world has changed', the point whereafter things won't be that they were before? How do they become established as a caesura and starting points of subsequent developments? As a common reference point for this workshop, we propose the year of 1967. As year of the *Naksa* (setback, debacle) after the Six-Day war with Israel, 1967 occupies an eminently important place in the historical imaginary of many people in the Middle East. This stands in interesting contrast to a European context where 1967 is eclipsed by the events of 1968 when leftist student movements seemed to shake the foundations of postwar Europe.

The aim of this workshop is twofold: First, it is meant identify the ordering principles on the basis of which different disciplines make sense of the past. How are years 'thought' in disciplines as different as literary studies, media studies, cultural studies, social anthropology and - last but not least - the different branches of history? This entails the question of how particular temporal expanses and points in time are identified/constructed as 'significant' in a specific academic context. How, for instance, do years understood as turning points contrast with temporal categories such as epochs, 'long' and 'short' centuries or threshold times (Koselleck's *Sattelzeiten*)? What role do narrative conventions play, and do they differ widely between the academic disciplines?

Those numerous ways of making sense of the past directly lead to the second question which is of paramount importance for regions such as the Middle East and North Africa, which find themselves at the periphery of the global academic field. What kind of bias do the ordering principles we employ introduce in our work, how do they shape questions and outcomes? How do we

deal with the danger of entrapping ourselves in argumentative routines which take for granted a year's overarching significance? Given the hegemony of certain ordering principles, be it within our respective disciplines or on a wider discursive scale, it is necessary to ask how such principles may be challenged.

By bringing together a number of scholars from different disciplines to reflect on the ways that the year of 1967 features - or does not feature - in their respective disciplines, we hope to arrive at a better understanding of how academic traditions and conventions shape the ways we situate our subject (matter) historically.

The workshop is jointly organised by the Figures of Thought |Turning Points Research Group (DFG, Leibniz), the department of History and the Media Studies of Marburg University.

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The workshop is open to all. If you wish to attend the workshop, please register until 5 November. Email: felix.lang@staff.uni-marburg.de.