

City Debates 2025

**Co-map, Re-map, Un-map:
Collective, Exploratory, and Radical Cartographies**

Speakers' Abstracts and Bios

Nour Abuzaid

A Cartography of Genocide

Since the onset of Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza in October 2023, Forensic Architecture has collected, mapped, and analysed data documenting attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by the Israeli military. Our research is compiled into a publicly accessible web platform that visualises the physical reshaping of Gaza according to strategic design. This includes the destruction of agricultural fields, orchards, greenhouses, and vital water infrastructure; systematic targeting of hospitals and healthcare workers; deliberate attacks on public utilities, roads, schools (including those designated as shelters), religious and governmental buildings; and sustained attacks on infrastructure and personnel essential for the transport and distribution of humanitarian aid and food.

We have further gathered and scrutinised evacuation orders issued by the Israeli military, directing Palestinians towards areas of Gaza deemed 'safe'. Analysis reveals that these orders have caused repeated, large-scale displacements of Palestinian populations, often directing them into zones subsequently targeted in attacks, thus exposing the performative and deceptive nature of Israel's claimed 'humanitarian measures'.

To identify patterns within this violence, our web platform transforms thousands of datapoints into an interactive, navigable cartographic interface. Users can filter data by regions, temporal periods, and categories of events to reveal trends and correlations—for instance, linking the military ground invasion to the targeted destruction of medical infrastructure.

Critical to our analysis are testimonies and visual documentation sourced directly from Gaza. These firsthand accounts and images are essential for interpreting and contextualising cartographic data, bridging the distance between aerial, colonial perspectives and lived, on-the-ground realities. This methodological approach mirrors earlier work by Forensic Architecture investigating massacres and mass graves from the Nakba, notably in Tantura, where survivors' testimonies and memory sketches provided critical insights linking British and Israeli aerial imagery to the oral history archives of the Nakba.

Overall, our findings reveal a systematic, organised effort to destroy life, the conditions necessary for life, and life-sustaining infrastructure in Gaza.

Nour Abuzaid is an architect, researcher, and computational designer. She is a Senior Researcher at Forensic Architecture, where she leads the web development team, conducts spatial investigations, and develops computational research methods. As a MENA liaison, Nour teaches Forensic Architecture's investigative methodologies to regional collaborators. She is committed to creating publicly accessible, web-based research tools aimed at supporting grassroots activism, particularly for non-expert actors on the ground in Palestine. Since October 2023, Nour has led and contributed to multiple investigations into Gaza, including *Cartography of Genocide*—a comprehensive cartographic analysis published as both a web platform and an in-depth report. The investigation reveals patterns of Israeli violence that indicate a systematic and organized campaign to destroy life, the conditions necessary for life, and life-sustaining infrastructure.

Pablo Ares

Tools for Collaborative Research

Iconoclasistas develops methodologies that combine participatory approaches and graphic resources to analyze and represent social realities. Their work focuses on critical cartography and the use of collective visual representations to synthesize knowledge and promote transformative actions. Among their key tools is collective mapping, a technique that helps visualize territories, experiences, and conflicts, fostering dialogue and critical thinking. They also create cartographic devices, graphic resources that organize and communicate information in an accessible way. Through creative workshops, they integrate theoretical reflection with hands-on exercises to encourage active participation. Additionally, they offer open-access materials, such as templates and methodological guides, enabling communities to adapt these tools to their needs. These strategies facilitate knowledge exchange, strengthen collective agency, and help uncover power structures, inequalities, and alternative narratives. Applied in various regions, their methodologies turn research into a tool for resistance and social transformation.

Iconoclasistas: Founded in 2006 by Julia Risler and Pablo Ares, Iconoclasistas merges graphic art, collaborative research, and participatory methodologies. Their work focuses on critical cartography and collective mapping to explore social, territorial, and political issues. Through workshops across Latin America and Europe, they promote knowledge exchange and critical analysis of power structures. Their open-access materials, including templates and methodological guides, allow communities to adapt their tools to different contexts. By combining theory with creative practice, Iconoclasistas transforms research into a tool for collective reflection, resistance, and social transformation.

Nishat Awan

Atlas Otherwise: Mapping Location Beyond Geolocation

While there have been many attempts to think and make maps differently, the atlas is usually understood as merely a compendium of maps rather than a form of knowledge production. How can we rethink and remake the atlas otherwise to tell stories that do not follow the logic of colonization and of property? These topics will be discussed through the long-term project, *Topological Atlas*, which developed a methodology for producing visual counter-geographies of borders. In following journeys of forced migration, the geographies addressed in this project are often places that are difficult to spend time in because of conflict, or they are places that have been constructed as out-of-bounds by states and other actors. These conditions provoke a different understanding of both location and distance, key terms for mapping displacement in relation to planetary phenomena. The recent forensic or evidentiary turn in the arts has been ushered in through the scopic view of satellites and the ubiquity of image material across digital platforms. Such practices of digital witnessing allow us to 'see' further and deeper into places that are at a distance from us, but at the same time create the conditions that make certain subjects recede from view. Thus, for spatial practitioners, there is a need to consider location beyond mere geolocation in our practices of mapping and modelling that are often also central to forms of intervention. How might we rethink notions of testimony and evidence in relation to the digital, knowing also that the witnessing of violence requires forms of empathy and affectivity that are not always readily available within computational forms of knowing? How can we think the digital not only as a tool or a method, but as a realm of possibility that may allow certain lives and worlds to become (il)legible,

mourn-able and addressable on their own terms?

Nishat Awan's research focuses on the intersection of geopolitics and space, including questions related to diasporas, migration, and border regimes. She is interested in modes of spatial representation, particularly in relation to the digital and the limits of witnessing as a form of ethical engagement with distant places. Her book *Diasporic Agencies* (Routledge, 2016) addressed the subject of how architecture and urbanism can respond to the consequences of increasing migration. She has also addressed alternative modes of architectural production in the co-authored book *Spatial Agency* (Routledge, 2011) and the co-edited book *Trans-Local-Act* (aaa-peprav, 2011). Her work has been exhibited at Nieuwe Instituut, Istanbul Biennale, Busan Museum of Modern Art, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, amongst others. She is Professor of Architecture and Visual Culture at UCL Urban Lab.

Ahmad Barclay

Surfacing Localised Stories: Mapping, Scrollytelling and (Semi)automation

A detailed map, or geo-visualisation, may contain hundreds or thousands of individual stories and narratives, yet it is near impossible to communicate these through this single, static visual. A map of 1940s Palestine conceals the fate of a thousand individual towns, villages, and cities. A 2020's map of income in the UK hides disparities between two adjacent urban neighbourhoods.

Based on nearly a decade of interactive mapping and geo-visualisation work, starting with Palestine Open Maps and continuing with the Office for National Statistics in the UK, this talk explores different ways to surface these kinds of localised and hyper-localised stories.

Through a series of example projects, a number of different techniques will be explored including mapping data at different scales, utilising "scrollytelling" to highlight curated stories and narratives, and the use of "semi-automated" journalism techniques to create localised data-driven stories for hundreds of individual locations.

The talk will also look at the impact of these projects, and how they have impacted discourses and offered people a tool to communicate their own individual stories.

Ahmad Barclay is an architect, UX designer, and coder who currently heads the Advanced Data Formats team at the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Previously, he led award winning infographics and visual storytelling projects as a founding partner with Visualizing Impact, and initiated Palestine Open Maps, an open data project supported by Mozilla and Creative Commons. Ahmad has contributed to a variety of publications, and facilitated courses and workshops based on his projects and practices in Beirut, London, Lisbon, Amman and Bangalore.

Nadine Bekdache

Spatializing Loss, Delineating Recovery

Public Works Studio's recent mapping initiatives spatialized the ongoing Israeli aggression, employing manual data aggregation and place-based narratives. By visualizing and reading across weapon deployment, threatened geographies, actual targets, timeframes, and attack intensity, these maps challenge dominant discursive imagery that reduce space to battlefields, revealing the aggressor's intent to eradicate viable spaces and preclude return. Simultaneously, they serve as blueprints for future recovery and reconstruction. As we experience countless losses, the act of

mapping offers the opportunity to engage in the now, whilst keeping track of the colonial impact and threat and identifying varied landscapes of destruction.

This mapping, rooted in past local collective efforts, facilitates weekly war accounts, contextualizes concepts like domicide and ecocide, and documents neighborhood losses. It constructs political stances and reimagines possibilities by meticulously recording time, place, and colonial aggression, ultimately centering daily struggles against colonial normalcy.

Nadine Bekdache is a practicing designer, urbanist, and co-founder of Public Works Studio. She researches socio-spatial phenomena through multidisciplinary methods; including mapping, imagery, and film as both processes of investigation and representation. She currently co-directs Public Works Studio and heads its Communication and Design Unit. The studio leads on investigative action research and politically engaged forms of representation, to address and actively respond to the chronic challenges facing just cities and equitable development in Lebanon. Nadine is also a graphic design instructor at the Lebanese University.

Gautam Bhan

New Directions for Southern Urban Praxis

The rise of theory from the global south has disrupted much of what was considered the ‘canon’ of urban studies. The southern shift in urban studies has given us a larger vocabulary with which to think about *all* cities with concepts and questions that come from cities of the global south. It has, to a lesser extent, also given us new forms of practice that emerge from an expanded understanding of urban lifeworlds.

Two decades later, this talk offers a reflective pause. It returns to the original impulses of southern urban theory – as an ethos of inquiry to ask questions from relational and moving peripheries while insisting that place matters in the production of thought – to assess what set of questions and practices should define future directions of southern urban thought. What does thinking from place, from cities of the global south, tell us to look at and do in such a dramatically re-arranged world? Southern urban thought needs new directions. This talk offers one set of possibilities for this direction in three forms: new conceptual vocabularies, an emergent set of questions rooted and offered from place, and provocations on new forms of practice. In doing so, it offers an invitation to collective thinking and reflection at a time of deep global and local uncertainties, arguing that newer relationships to knowledge are urgently needed in this geohistorical moment.

Gautam Bhan is Associate Dean of the School of Human Development as well as Head of Human Development at the School of Human Development at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bangalore. He holds a PhD in City and Regional Planning from the University of California, Berkeley. At IIHS, Gautam teaches, researches and writes on the politics of urban poverty and inequality, urban and planning theory, housing, and identity and social practice. He also leads work on urban welfare regimes, social protection, and informal work. New projects include work on child health outcomes for the children of informal workers in domestic work and construction, design and delivery of urban social protection regimes, and work on climate change’s impact on health and livelihood outcomes for urban workers. He is the author of *In the Public’s Interest: Evictions, Citizenship and Inequality in Contemporary Delhi* (University of Georgia Press 2017; Orient Blackswan 2017) and co-editor (with Smita Srinivasan and Vanessa Watson) of the *Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South* (Routledge 2018). Most recently, he is co-author with Edgar Pieterse, Susan Parnell, and Michael Keith of *Cities Rethought: A New Urban Disposition* (Polity/Context Westland 2024).

Martina Bovo

Pilot Books and Landing Spaces: Navigating Plural Urban Experiences

This contribution reflects on the kind of knowledge to be deployed to ‘see’ and represent migration landing processes, through a parallelism with pilot books. To do so, it presents a mapping experience of landing spaces emerging from refugees and asylum seekers’ arrival in Palermo, Italy. Recent migration and arrival processes across the Mediterranean have been challenging phenomena for territories and cities, implying new temporalities, mobilities, and subjectivities. Spatial transformations, however, are often hard to grasp; arrival places are not always concentrated within a single neighborhood and may not imply physical transformation of spaces but rather of their uses.

There is a need to assume a phenomenological approach to research and policy making, namely, to ‘learn from’ spaces, practices, and uses to fully understand arrival and urban transformation and think of new ways of organizing the city. The contribution discusses the importance of mobilizing a certain type of knowledge in the study of urban spaces and particularly in the production of descriptions and representations, arguing for their transformative potential. To this aim, the contribution proposes a parallelism with a non-urban, non-planning object: the pilot book, a handbook for along-shore navigation. Such a reference allows for the discussion of at least three points: the importance of an experience-based knowledge, the focus on the interplay between people, places, and practices, and the possibility of building a less-normative knowledge.

Drawing from research conducted in Palermo, this work presents a qualitative mapping of landing spaces developed through the reference to pilot books. Mapping gradually unveiled and represented the plurality of landing populations and the relative geographies of spaces in the city, their features and organizational settings. The knowledge mobilized, allowed to grasp the type of spatial transformations involved, while making space to imagine a city ‘otherwise’.

Martina Bovo is a postdoc research fellow at the Università Iuav di Venezia (IUAV)/University of Venice, Dipartimento di Culture del Progetto and contract professor at Politecnico di Milano, Italy. With an architecture background, she obtained a PhD in Urban Planning, Design and Policy and worked as postdoc research fellow at KU Leuven, Belgium. Her research focuses on the migration-city nexus, particularly on the territorial dimension of migration and arrival processes, and on arrival spaces and infrastructures; on this topic, she recently published *Landing spaces, processes and infrastructures in Italy* (Routledge, 2024). She collaborates on teaching and research activities in the fields of urban and welfare policies and institutional learning. Along her research, she has developed an interest in mapping and counter-mapping approaches, as well as in ethnographic approaches to urban analysis.

Imani Jacqueline Brown

Fractal Catastrophes Generate New Solidarities

All along the Mississippi River in Louisiana, my homeland, groves of trees interrupt a seamless tapestry of sugarcane plantations and petrochemical plants; they are the remnants of the bottomland hardwood forests in which historically enslaved people interred their loved ones. Forming the outer edge of antebellum sugarcane plantations, these “backswamps” stretched for hundreds of miles, opening each parcel of carceral property onto a vast, communal terrain of freedom. Recognized as ungovernable, these backswamps were hated and feared by the colonists; for enslaved Africans, they were a lifeworld in which they could steward their own ways-of-being. Trees were valued as ecological anchors tethering life and death, spirituality and political resistance, Africa and the

Americas. Today, our surviving burial groves have reemerged as the frontlines of local resistance to the petrochemical industry.

Through cultural practice and exchange, as well as research in newspaper and activist archives, I have traced genealogical threads of extractive ruptures and ecological resistance from Louisiana to West Central Africa. With our burial groves as portals, I take a quantum leap from Louisiana to the Maiombe Rainforest, which has been protected by enduring eco-cultural values and where 20th-century anticolonial resistance movements established their guerilla bases. I was surprised and humbled to locate the people's struggle of a third, seemingly "unrelated" geography at the heart of this genealogical quest across spacetime: Palestine. In mapping the fractal ruptures of extractivism, this paper will reveal the constellations of ecological integrity that hold our struggles, along with the possibilities for our liberation, together.

Imani Jacqueline Brown is an artist, activist, and architectural researcher from New Orleans, based in London. Her work investigates the "continuum of extractivism," which spans from settler-colonial genocide and slavery to fossil fuel production and climate change.^[1] In exposing the layers of violence and resistance that form the foundations of settler-colonial society, she opens space to imagine paths to ecological reparations.

Imani's practice combines photography, videography, archival research, ecological philosophy, legal theory, people's history, remote and local sensing, and counter-cartographic strategies to disentangle the spatial logics that make geographies, unmake communities, and break Earth's geology. Her research is disseminated internationally through art installations, public actions, reports, and testimony delivered to courts and organs of the United Nations.

Among other things, Imani is a PhD candidate in Geography at Queen Mary, University of London, a research fellow with Forensic Architecture, and a member of the Rise St. James Louisiana Historic Committee.

Joelle Deeb

Cartographies of Water Commons: Fluid Ecologies and Disrupted Landscapes

Water resources have never been passive. In the Middle East, rivers have long been transient sites of conflict and negotiation, shaped by shifting ecological conditions and the imposition of modern infrastructure. Conventional cartographies, in turn, usually tend to oversimplify shared waters, obscuring the political, cultural, and ecological complexities they embody. Drawing from *The Water Commons Archives* — an open-source research endeavor that critically looks into shared water resources beyond imposed boundaries — examines how *the Orontes, An Nabr al Kabir, Al-Queiq, the Euphrates basins, and the Yarmouk Sub-basin*, emblematic of the region's contested water systems, have been diverted, exploited, and at some point, reclaimed, revealing the spatial complexity and shared knowledge embedded in these waterways that extend beyond boundary lines.

Moving beyond static, resource-based frameworks, *The Water Commons Archives* repositions shared resources as fluid ecologies and spaces of collective knowledge, ecological interdependence, and contested governance, confronting the conventional authority of top-down cartography and foregrounding the perspectives of local communities whose water knowledge systems resist hegemonic control, allowing to perceive rivers as living systems, fluid, and contested commons, subverting the colonial models of control that have long attempted to reshape the region. Through understanding participatory mapping and speculative cartographies, this talk examines how mapping waters can be perceived as a tool of resistance while centralized cartographic processes have sought to impose rigid territorial logic, damming, diverting, and enclosing water. Vernacular

mapping strategies of river ecologies reveal how local knowledge continues to shape and reclaim these waterways as living, dynamic commons that bind people to the land and each other.

Joelle Deeb is an architect and researcher focused on the intersection of water systems, urban development, and cultural heritage. In 2024, she founded and now leads *The Water Commons Archives-Syria*, a research initiative dedicated to documenting Syria's water-bordering systems and supporting urban studies and educational outreach. Her work sheds light on the evolving spatial dynamics of water systems and their deep impact on the sociocultural fabric of the Middle East. Since 2023, Joelle has spearheaded the development of the *Orontes River Repository*, an archive that explores the socio-environmental challenges facing the Orontes River basin. Through innovative cartographic mapping and experimental documentation, her research uncovers the erosion of collective memory and reimagines spatial practices as acts of cultural reflection and continuity. Joelle's work has been selected for the *Venice Biennale Architettura 2025* and honored with the prestigious *Biennale College Architettura* grant. Featured in several influential platforms and writings, including *Afikra*, *Daftar Journal*, and *MIT Thresholds 50*, her research on water knowledge earned her the 2023 International *Tamayouz Excellence Award* for her thesis and the 2024 *Ettijabat Research Grant*. Through her work, she remains dedicated to bridging community-driven research, documentation, and design to shed light on the evolving relationship between water and the built environment.

Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein [Data Feminism book talk screening](#)

As data are increasingly mobilized in the service of governments and corporations, their unequal conditions of production, their asymmetrical methods of application, and their unequal effects on both individuals and groups have become increasingly difficult for data scientists - and others who rely on data in their work - to ignore. But it is precisely this power that makes it worth asking: "Data science by whom? Data science for whom? Data science with whose interests in mind?" These are some of the questions that emerge from what we call data feminism, a way of thinking about data science and its communication that is informed by the past several decades of intersectional feminist activism and critical thought. Illustrating data feminism in action, this talk will show how challenges to the male/female binary can help to challenge other hierarchical (and empirically wrong) classification systems; it will explain how an understanding of emotion can expand our ideas about effective data visualization; how the concept of invisible labor can expose the significant human efforts required by our automated systems; and why the data never, ever "speak for themselves." The goal of this talk, as with the project of data feminism, is to model how scholarship can be transformed into action: how feminist thinking can be operationalized in order to imagine more ethical and equitable data practices.

Catherine D'Ignazio is a hacker mama, scholar, and artist/designer who focuses on feminist technology, data justice, and civic engagement. She has run women's health hackathons, designed global news recommendation systems, created talking and tweeting water quality sculptures, and led walking data visualizations to envision the future of sea level rise. Her 2020 book from MIT Press, *Data Feminism*, co-authored with Lauren Klein, charts a course for more ethical and empowering data science practices. Her second book, *Counting Feminicide: Data Feminism in Action* (MIT Press, 2024) is an extended case study about grassroots data activism to end gender-related violence. D'Ignazio is an Associate Professor of Urban Science and Planning in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT where she is the Director of the Data + Feminism Lab.

Lauren Klein is Winship Distinguished Research Professor and Associate Professor in the departments of Quantitative Theory & Methods and English at Emory University. She directs the Emory Digital Humanities Lab and the Atlanta Interdisciplinary AI Network. Klein's research brings together computational and critical methods in order to explore questions of gender, race, and justice. She is author (with Catherine D'Ignazio) of the award-winning *Data Feminism* (MIT Press, 2020), and editor (with Matthew K. Gold) of *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Univ. of Minnesota Press), among other publications. She is currently completing *Data by Design: A History in Five Charts*, forthcoming from the MIT Press in 2025.

Sophie Dyer and Sasha Engelmann
[The Year of the Weather](#)

The Year of Weather is a durational project activating a planetary network of DIY Satellite Ground Stations to capture the last transmissions of three weather satellites as the planet exceeds 1.5 C. Led by open-weather (Soph Dyer and Sasha Engelmann) the Year of Weather is the first cultural initiative to document earth's changing weather and climate through volunteer-led satellite imagery and a participatory methodology. At a moment in which publicly funded infrastructures for earth observation are increasingly threatened, the project asserts public ownership and access to environmental knowledge. In this talk, open-weather will explore the emerging Year of Weather infrastructure and share key contributions from ground station operators, from Los Angeles to Phnom Penh and Cornwall. Beyond a politics of environmental sensing and knowledge, key to this collective mapping effort is the building of transnational networks that at once grapple with the unevenness of climate catastrophe as well as the interconnections and solidarities that bind local struggles.

Open-weather is a feminist experiment in imaging and imagining the earth and its weather systems using DIY tools. We weave speculative storytelling with low-cost hardware and open-source software to transform our relations to a planet in a climate crisis. Co-led by designer Soph Dyer and geographer Sasha Engelmann since 2020, open-weather makes artworks, leads inclusive workshops, and develops resources on satellite imagery reception and reading.

Jadd Hallaj
[Aggregating Power: Mapping Territorial Orders in Syria](#)

Maps are proscriptive instruments far more than descriptive ones. They play a dual role in both depicting and shaping territories and should be interpreted within their historical context. In Syria, maps have contributed to shaping the country's territorial orders throughout the last century and will no doubt continue to influence the emerging landscape of post-war Syria.

By drawing on recent projects and research, this presentation begins with an overview of the role of mapping in shaping structures of power in Syria. It traces the social demarcation of land during the Ottoman era, the use of precision technologies for social control during the French Mandate, and the unspoken territorial system of the Baath party. These historical mapping practices are critically linked to enduring spatial divisions, asymmetries, and centralities.

By scrutinizing the logic behind spatial data models, this presentation reveals how mapping not only depicts but actively contributes to the aggregation and contestation of political authority. It will explore the underlying spatial dynamics that have defined Syria's governance structures, and their potential future evolutions. It will question how maps adapt to modern imperatives, while offering new avenues for understanding local socio-economic realities.

The presentation will open on the potential of alternative mapping techniques for re-imagining spatial governance in post-conflict Syria and the future challenges mapping initiatives might face. Emphasizing the promise of participatory mapping and digital mediation, it argues for the map's role in empowering local communities, enhancing service delivery, and promoting inclusive development by bridging the gap between state-centric and grassroots approaches to mapping.

Jadd Hallaj is an architect, researcher, and urban planner from Aleppo with a focus on spatial data and Geographic Information Systems. He earned his master's degree in architecture from the ENSA Paris la Villette in 2020. Currently, he is a member of LUGARIT – a think-and-do tank that produces knowledge to support communities and institutions in leveraging their resources and ingenuity to consolidate “real” development on the ground. His work merges digital technologies and participatory approaches to promote territorial innovation. In 2021, he co-founded the Living Summer School, an Erasmus+ informal education initiative and member of the LINA network for European architecture. In 2023, his team was the recipient of the EUROPLAN Prize for the development of Rouen's Eastern Seine river banks.

Nityanand Jayaraman

Counter-mapping as Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges: How Subaltern Fishers and Activists are Saving the Ennore Wetlands in Chennai, India

From a Euro-colonial frontier that was transformed by East India Company's industrialisation of salt production to generate revenue, the once diverse habitats and interwoven histories of the tidal wetlands of Ennore in the south Indian coastal metropolis of Chennai began to unravel after independence as they became a site of internal fossil colonialism. Government-owned coal and petroleum infrastructure began encroaching into and polluting the wetlands, erasing the animated life world that was the source of livelihoods, identities, and meanings for local communities who came from the lowest rungs of India's caste hierarchy. Neither land nor water, the wetlands were seen as non-conforming in-between spaces and treated as valueless, wild, and begging to be civilised and turned into property. Places with deeply layered meanings for local communities were abstracted into governable and tradable spaces to facilitate capital flows and accumulation. But this is not a story about oppression and defeat; rather it is a narrative about how local fishers recruited solidarity to fight back in a campaign to reclaim and restore the wetlands. Drawing on decolonial and ignorance studies literatures, this presentation critically analyses the creative counter-mapping campaign launched by fishers and activists as cartographic, performative, and affective insurrections of subjugated knowledges and histories. We show how the campaign used the colonisers' tools of mapping and devised their own ways of mapping back to un-make state's plans and maps and present geographical knowledge from the margins as a way of remaking reality and opening possibilities of alternative futures. This presentation is based on a co-authored paper written by Nityanand Jayaraman, Lindsay Bremner, Karen Coelho, and Pooja Kumar.

Nityanand Jayaraman is an engineer-turned journalist and social activist until recently based in Chennai, India. Over the last three decades, he has worked alongside coastal communities fighting against destructive and land-degrading activities in the name of development and conservation. In 2002, he co-founded the Vettiver Collective that mobilises science, law, arts and media-based solidarity for social and environmental justice struggles of the marginalised. He is currently pursuing a PhD in political science at the University of Waikato in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Omar Khaled

Mapping to Instigate Action, Mapping for Interaction

In contested urban environments, where cities are continually expanding within and beyond the formal radar, mapping serves as a critical and dynamic tool for engagement with the city, moving beyond mere documentation or archiving. The role of mapping, particularly reflecting on CLUSTER's work, can be positioned as a dialectic mode of interaction; to interact with the city and its stakeholders, to critically research, and to co-create a framework for intervention. Over the past decade, CLUSTER has been developing frameworks to address urban informality and issues of public space through critical mapping, action research, and creative design interventions. This multifaceted approach aims to reflect on mapping's potential to intervene, both physically and intellectually, and expand its base of action to include diverse stakeholders.

Mapping in this sense not only documents but also analyzes both tangible and intangible urban elements, for instance, cognitive mapping, crafts and creative initiatives, sound mapping, and stakeholder relationships. Through the creation of interactive online maps, publications, urban tours, and thematic itineraries, CLUSTER seeks to establish a comprehensive, accessible platform for researchers, designers, policymakers, and engaged citizens. The talk will first engage with this expansive database that serves as a tool for critical reflection and the development of alternative urban narratives to the city along with modes of intervention. Further, the talk reflects on another positioning of mapping as an in-parallel inferred process with the design, implementation and activation of design-build projects, most of which are pilot interventions in public space. In order to navigate the multiplicity of relevant parties and individuals, making sense of the networks of relevant authorities, potential partners, complementary initiatives, suppliers, and craftspeople both propels and records an interchange. Through its dialectical and critical engagement approach to mapping, CLUSTER presents a framework for urban documentation, intervention and dialogue.

Omar Khaled, a visual artist and multidisciplinary architect at CLUSTER - Cairo Lab for Urban Studies Training and Environmental Research, obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Architectural Engineering from the American University in Cairo in 2023. Believing in the duty towards the city and its inhabitants, he recognizes the power of individual and collective creativity in spatial praxis, making his inquiries grounded in socio-political and economic mechanisms along with environmental matters in the built environment. During his time at CLUSTER he participated in a number of local and international discussions, one of which was a panel discussion on the design-build project "Community Care Vehicle" during the World Urban Forum 12, held in Cairo in 2024. He also led a tour and talk as part of the CLUSTER Talks series titled: "Paradoxical Union: the Meeting of the 'Less' and the 'More' in Nasr City", attempting to contextualize the discourse on Modernism and Postmodernism.

Nikolas Kosmatopoulos

MAPPING INSURGENSEAS, Part I: The Oceans of Palestine Solidarity

Currently, a renewed drive is transforming oceans from a site exterior to our terrestrial designs to one where new forms and modes of knowledge, extraction, valuation, control, securitization, and governance are emerging. Geo-locating technologies are fixing oceanic landscapes once unmanageable and unimaginable; remote sensing devices are chronicling the oceanic more-than-human as accessible resources; mechanical, biological, and aqua-cultural advances are assembling into new foundations for corporate investment and state-sponsored "blue growth".

Indeed, where the oceans were once mere surfaces across which terrestrial productions, forces, and

bodies flowed, it is now an emerging territory/terrain for a range of entanglements, productive and otherwise. Taken together, there is a clear “great appropriation” of the planetary seas.

Faced with these emergences, communities around the world often rise against them or engage in multiple forms of contestation, adaptation, and negotiation. The relationship of these communities to the sea also varies extraordinarily. Some are coastal communities affected by extractivism; others might be activist communities moving against sieges and borders; others might be insurgent communities that tackle oceanic memories of repression.

A starting point of Insurgensea project is the acknowledgment that a diverse and dynamic politicization of the global oceans is currently emerging beyond the shores of the nation-state. The project addresses the world seas as one socio-political ecosystem – emerging, essential, and frequently insurgent. It aims to explore how community-mobilized ships/ports/regions move across and shape this space, investigating the causes and consequences of a rising politics at sea that remains largely uncharted.

One of the aims is to create empirically informed mappings of community activism and sea-related insurgencies using interdisciplinary and participatory methods (mapping, modelling, archives, interviews, audio-visual material, open science).

Nikolas Kosmatopoulos is Associate Professor of Politics and Anthropology at the American University of Beirut, author of *Master Peace: Lebanon's Violence and the Politics of Expertise* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024), and PI for the URB-funded FAIRSHIPs research project (Floating Activism & Insurgency Research). Further team members include Roua Chakaroun (PPIA-GRA), Dina Al Amood (ECON – URVP), Christopher Kabakian (ECON – URVP).

Laura Kurgan

GPS for the Brain: Cognitive Mapping Revisited

Navigation has typically involved something more technical than biological, especially in relation to traversing and remembering spaces. From compass, map, and astrolabe to GPS, humans have relied on a variety of devices to get themselves or their projectiles from here to there. But these tools are not the only game in town – biological navigation, in fact, is crucial for the everyday life, movement, and survival of a myriad of species. Nowadays, this interplay between technical and biological navigation is increasingly blurry – every living thing that moves navigates with biological and technical sensors. What are the characteristics of navigation that we encounter along the gradient between the technical and the biological, between positioning and memory? Laura Kurgan will put the discourse of cognitive mapping into dialogue with advances in neuroscience and artificial intelligence, where scientists now routinely speak of “GPS for the brain”. The goal is to account for a few important misalignments in the metaphors used to describe how the brain works, as well as revisit and critique the influence of “cognitive mapping” in architecture and urbanism today.

Laura Kurgan is a Professor at the Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation at Columbia University, where she directs the Master of Science in Computational Design Practices, and the Center for Spatial Research (CSR). She is the author of *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics* (Zone Books, 2013) and Co-Editor of *Ways of Knowing Cities* (Columbia Books on Architecture, 2019). She is working on a book on *Conflict Urbanism* presenting and reflecting upon ten years of collaborative work at CSR. Her work has been exhibited internationally, most recently at the Chicago Architecture Biennial (2019), at the Palais De Tokyo in Paris (2016), and at the Biennale Architettura di Venezia 2018 and 2025.

Ana Méndez de Andés

Mapping in Common: Tactical Cartographies and Collective Action

From the first wave of tactical cartographies in Spain in 2004 to more recent research-action projects related to municipalist movements, urban social movements have used collaborative mapping as a tool to activate processes. These are activist and activating processes in which maps are not simply technical documents that - more or less - accurately represent a given territory, but material and conceptual re-presentations of the interests of the actors who produce them, challenging the perspectives, track points, nodes, vectors and tools of analysis they use. As methods of co-production, tactical cartographies and relational maps question the way we perceive and re-present the material and immaterial spaces we inhabit with the interactions that shape them, as well as the basic operations on which representation depends. Mapping ‘in common’ is therefore “an act of creation [that] is not simply a tracing of territory, but a revelation of previously invisible or unimaginable realities; it does not [re]produce reality, but a way of looking at it. Although the map is not the territory, mapping is a way of self-organising, generating new connections, and transforming the material and immaterial conditions in which we find ourselves. [The map] is not the territory, but it certainly produces territory.” [1]

[1] Car_Tac definition of tactical cartographies in Fadaiat, Centro de Ediciones de la Diputación de Málaga, 2007, p. 157.

Ana Méndez de Andés is an urban researcher and practitioner with more than two decades of experience in the analysis of urban transformations, new institutions, and democratic governance. Ana graduated as an architect and urban planner from the Escuela Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid and completed her PhD on urban commons and municipalism at the University of Sheffield. She is a founding member of the Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid and the Urban Commons Research Collective. As part of the municipalist movement, she has worked as a strategic planning consultant for Madrid City Council and as a coordinator of the European Municipalist Network. As part of her commitment to mapping processes, Ana co-founded the Car_Tac collective in 2004 and has recently analysed the relational aspects of urban commoning processes in Barcelona, co-produced a mapping of the municipalist ecosystem, and participated in the Critical Mapping for Municipalist Movements research project.

Batoul Yassine

Archiving Gaza Towards the Production of Recovery Imaginaries

This paper reflects on the project “Tracking the Urbicide in Gaza” by the Beirut Urban Lab. It discusses the modality of digital tracking as “archiving” and investigates the role of “archiving” within participatory recovery processes. Since October 7, 2023, the densely populated and besieged Gaza Strip has endured devastating military operations, reducing entire neighborhoods to rubble and shattering countless lives. Informed by its long-standing engagement with conflict-affected sites across the Arab region, the Beirut Urban Lab responded to the war in Gaza despite the challenge of working remotely and the limited access to reliable information. The Lab produced a digital platform entitled “Tracking the Urbicide in Gaza” which documents the various layers of the built environment, as well as green and open spaces, and tracks the damage that followed since October 7. The project involved extensive data consolidation from multiple sources, which were cross-referenced, verified, and continuously updated. The platform shows that by September 2024, 49.6% of buildings in Gaza had sustained damage, 71.6% of agricultural fields had been destroyed, and

82.4% of greenhouses had been eradicated. This paper argues that the work is not merely a documentation of the urbicide but an act of archiving Gaza—a process that not only preserves records but facilitates the crafting of narratives, both historical reflective narratives and future imaginaries for its recovery. The aim was therefore focused on the notion of egalitarian archiving that is accessible to local actors and the people of Gaza, one that encourages multiple engagements and interpretations to counter dominant or privileged singular narrative.

Batoul Yassine is a research coordinator at the Beirut Urban Lab at the American University of Beirut. With extensive experience in architecture and urban design, her research explores urban recovery in areas impacted by crises, war, and displacement. Her recent work focuses on developing inclusive and participatory recovery strategies for post-conflict and post-war contexts in Lebanon and across the Arab world. She holds a Master's in Urban Design from the American University of Beirut and a Master's in Architecture from the Lebanese University.

Discussants' Bios

Nadi Abu Saada is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the School of Architecture and Design at the American University of Beirut (AUB). His work focuses on the material histories and visual cultures of the modern Arab world. Nadi has earned his Ph.D. and M.Phil. degrees in architecture at the University of Cambridge and his B.A. in architecture at the University of Toronto. He was previously an Aga Khan Postdoctoral Fellow in Islamic Architecture at MIT and an ETH Zürich Postdoctoral Fellow at ETH Zürich. He is the co-editor of *Arab Modern: Architecture and the Project of Independence* (gta Verlag, 2025) and editor of *Resurgent Nabda: The Arab Exhibitions in Mandate Jerusalem* (Kaph Books, 2024). Besides his writings, Nadi has also been involved in research-based curatorial work. He has curated and participated in a number of exhibitions around the world including in Ramallah, Amman, Zurich, Venice, Dubai, and Montreal.

Monica Basbous is a multi-disciplinary researcher and educator trained in architecture and critical media studies. Using various forms and media, her work is concerned with how power is negotiated through the production of space, time, knowledge, bodies, and their representations. She has taught at the Lebanese American University and at the American University of Beirut, and has a decade-long research experience around questions of urban planning and informality, mobility and public space, housing rights, and environmental justice in Lebanon. Her recent writings were published in the *Architectural Review* (2021), *Journal Makan* (2023), *Middle-East Critique* (2023), *Jeem* (2024), and *Weird Economies* (2024). She is currently a doctoral researcher at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.

Mona Fawaz is a Professor in Urban Studies and Planning at the American University of Beirut and co-founder of the Beirut Urban Lab. She writes about urban history and historiography, social and spatial justice, informality and the law, property and space, as well as planning practice, theory, and pedagogy. She researches, teaches, and advocates strategies for more inclusive cities. Mona was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Studies at Harvard University during the 2014/15 academic year and in Summer 2017.

Mariangela Gasparotto is a researcher in anthropology at Ifpo (Amman). After completing a PhD dissertation on sociability practices, norms, internal migrations, and consumption behaviors of youth in Ramallah (Palestine), she undertook a new project focused on infrastructures and their use in the city of Zarqa (Jordan). She is also currently involved in several collective projects that explore, through alternative methods and writings, futures and memories of cities, as well as urban waste in both times of war and non-war.

Positioned at the intersection of urban and political anthropology, her research explores daily forms of violence, hierarchies, mobility patterns, and the ways in which spaces are appropriated, subverted, renegotiated, and adapted through various forms of solidarity, internal and external borders, and local knowledge.

Ahmad Gharbieh is Associate Professor and Convener of the Graphic Design Program at the School of Architecture and Design, American University of Beirut. He is co-founder of the Beirut Urban Lab, an interdisciplinary research space where he leads the critical mapping research/design track. His scholarly work in critical cartography explores mapping and data visualization as methods of studying, representing, and analyzing a wide range of urban issues and socio-spatial phenomena: security and militarization, territorial geographies, place-making, building development, displacement, conflict, and political violence, among others. His work has been exhibited at and published in multiple academic and public venues. He is the curator of City Debates 2025.

Mona Harb is Professor of Urban Studies and Politics at the American University of Beirut where she is also co-founder and research lead at the Beirut Urban Lab. Her research investigates governance and territoriality in contexts of contested sovereignty; urban activism and oppositional politics; and how people make collective life in fragmented cities. She is the author of *Le Hezbollah à Beirut: de la banlieue à la ville*, co-author of *Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shi'i South Beirut* (with Lara Deeb), co-editor of *Local Governments and Public Goods: Assessing Decentralization in the Arab World* (with Sami Atallah), and co-editor of *Refugees as City-Makers* (with Mona Fawaz et al.). She serves on the editorial boards of MELG, IJMES, EPC, and CSSAME.

Elizabeth Saleh is an assistant professor in sociocultural anthropology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies at the American University of Beirut. She works at the intersection of political and economic anthropology. Her first long-term ethnographic fieldwork was based in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and culminated in 2014, in her doctoral thesis about the Lebanese wine industry. Elizabeth's current ethnographic research began in 2015 and is about the lives of underage Syrian waste pickers growing up at a small scrapyards located in a run-down building in Beirut.

Jana Traboulsi is a visual artist, designer and academic. She is Assistant Professor of Graphic Design at the American University of Beirut (AUB). She holds a BFA in Graphic design from AUB, and an MA in Media and Communication Studies from Goldsmiths College, London. She is the co-founder and art director of Bidayat pan-arab quarterly, and of Snoubar Bayrou publishing house. In 2019, she founded the LAAB, a collective initiative interested in exploring creatively and critically the relationship of media and the arts to politics. Her artist book *The Book of Margins*, shortlisted for the Jameel Prize 2021, has been exhibited at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Rami Zurayk is a professor at the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture at the American University of Beirut, Landscape Design and Ecosystem Management Department. He was a member of the steering committee of the high-level panel of experts on food security and nutrition

(HLPE) of the Committee of World Food Security (CFS) from 2015-19 and a commissioner on the EAT-Lancet commission on sustainable diets from sustainable food systems. He is a founding member of the Arab Food Sovereignty Network and an advisory board member of SEAL (Social and Economic Action for Lebanon), and an advisory board member for the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems and Community Development. He has worked extensively on the political ecology of Arab food security and its linkages with the agrarian question. He obtained his BSc and MSc from the American University of Beirut and his DPhil from Oxford University.