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Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties.
Zeina Maasri, Cambridge University Press, 2020, 342 pp., 39 b&w and 40 col. illus.,
\$120.00, cloth. ISBN: 9781108487719

In her book, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties*, Zeina Maasri examines the development of Beirut as a 'nodal city' (8), a centre for radical publishing in the Arab region during the 'long 1960s'. The region's 'global sixties' are defined as the period marked by 1958's anticolonial struggles and Cold War politics, through to Beirut's place in anti-imperialist and Third Worldist politics and the Palestinian revolutionary project, to the start of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. As Maasri shows, during this time Beirut encouraged the flow of radical visual and political discourses, shaped translocal aesthetic and political subjectivities, and in turn, was shaped by them. At the core of the book's argument is the critical role of the mobility of printed matter — magazines, books and ephemera — to political relations, and as such, to the development of aesthetic and political subjectivities.

In six chapters, the reader is presented with Beirut's shifting image, away from post-independence Arab nationalism, to its tourist promotion as 'The Paris of the East', a European-Mediterranean leisure capital in the 1960s (Chapter 1). Through the analysis of case studies such as the Arab CIA-funded journal *Hiwar* (Chapter 2) and the *Silsilat al-Nafa'is* [Precious Books Series] (Chapter 3), we encounter Beirut as a nodal site where the mobility of a host of local and regional actors (artists, designers, poets and intellectuals and their literary and visual productions), was enabled by an influx of

capital and printing technologies (14). As a result of such interconnected visual fields of relations (16), Beirut developed into the region's publishing centre and an important site of 'counter-hegemonic struggle in processes of decolonization' (135). Lastly, towards the end of the 'global' decade and the book, it is shown how Beirut's central role in radical publishing, modernist aesthetics and cultural writing for the Arab world (Chapter 4) is transformed through the rise of the Palestinian resistance (Chapter 5) to its depiction as the 'Arab Hanoi' (Chapter 6). The book amply demonstrates how this post-1967 Arab-Israeli war conception of the city imagined Beirut as a place for the beginning of the Palestinian revolutionary project situating it within Third World internationalism, a nodal city where revolutionary ideas, solidarity aesthetic and political discourses converged.

Cosmopolitan Radicalism expands on the author's previous book *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (2008)¹ in calling attention to the entanglement of visuality, materiality and circulation of printed matter — inherent graphic design attributes — to political relations, and as such, their role in constituting aesthetic, affective and discursive sites of 'everyday political struggle and aesthetic relations' (245). Similarly to *Off the Wall*, the author draws on uncharted archives of printed matter (24) which she has often painstakingly collected and organised herself, alongside personal interviews, press and several secondary sources. The analysis draws on rich visual printed material and the author's compelling examination of local, regional and global art and design histories that map these intersecting aesthetic and political conjunctions.

Maasri convincingly presents Beirut as a conduit of interlocking 'transnational *circuits* and associated discursive and aesthetic formations [that] overlapped and contended with one another (11-12). In this richly illustrated book, modernist aesthetics and international design, local, regional and global political ideas and publications, artists, designers, poets and intellectuals from the region, are these *circuits* that intersected through, and in, Beirut. In doing so, they produced a visual field of relations that the author defines as *translocal visibility*. Hence one of the book's significant contributions is its place-specific methodological approach that appoints Beirut at the centre of its enquiry. In doing this, Maasri challenges nation-centred cultural histories of Lebanon and its 'European-oriented cosmopolitanism' (243).

On the whole, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism* decentres mainstream approaches to conducting art and design history. In the first place, it moves beyond the disciplines' regularly nation-centred narrative constructions. Secondly, it contributes towards turning conceptions of the 'cosmopolitan' and the image of the 'global' on their heads, whilst simultaneously, radicalising them. Further, the book contributes towards destabilising fixed bipolar perceptions of Cold War visual and cultural production whilst filling in a significant gap in the largely US and Euro-centric scholarship of the 'long 1960s'. Most importantly, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism* encourages a translocal, dynamic, fluid, de-centred and politically entangled study of visibility and materiality. As such, it leads the path to, a much-discussed but less so substantially explored, decolonising process of art and design history.

In this reviewer's opinion, the book contributes greatly toward a paradigm shift in scholarship and as such, it would benefit from further defining its use of terminology, namely its engagement with the 'cosmopolitan'. Even though Maasri reconceives and radicalises the term whilst also presenting us with the new idiom, 'Cosmopolitan Radicalism', her excellent study has also much to offer in additional alternative theorisations of the practices of 'cosmopolitanism'.² This is a minor criticism of an important book that broadens our understanding of the role of publishing, of visuality and materiality, and the ways graphic design intersects with political relations, themselves constitutive of visual and aesthetic fields.

Special reference should be made to the large number of full-colour plate reproductions of magazine and book spreads that are not displayed as isolated visual elements, a tendency that has been prominent in design books, but reproduced in a context-based visual approach that respects editorial and art direction practices. This book would be of interest to art and design scholars, students and practitioners alike, interested in diverse fields such as Art and Design History, Middle Eastern Studies, Cold War Cultural Studies, Publishing and Cultural Politics amongst others. It is an excellent book for anyone with an interest in the entangled relationship of publishing, visual culture, aesthetics and politics.

Notes

¹ Z. Maasri, *Off the Wall, Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (London, IB Tauris, 2009).

² *Cosmopolitanism*. Chakrabarty, Dipesh, Carol A. Breckenridge, Homi K. Bhabha, & Sheldon Pollock (eds.), (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).