



Centre for Gulf Studies

## **32<sup>nd</sup> EXETER GULF CONFERENCE**

### **Liberalism and Its Paradoxes in the Arabian Peninsula**

22-23 June 2020

#### **Call for Papers**

The University of Exeter's Centre for Gulf Studies invites papers for the 2020 annual Gulf Conference on the theme of *Liberalism and Its Paradoxes*. Within the last decade, a plethora of voices from around the world have emerged to critique liberalism as the regnant ideology of the globe. Rash or relevant, these critiques agree on the unfolding ideological collapse of some of liberalism's core tropes, such as multiculturalism and freedom of movement, both human and capital. Meanwhile, the regimes of the Arabian Peninsula are currently in the midst of a self-induced reincarnation into precisely the liberal, 'moderate', and free-market social orders that have lost currency elsewhere. This year's Conference takes these changes as an opportunity to ask how we map such ideological change in the Arabian Peninsula.

While these questions have animated debate across disciplines, commentary on the Arabian Peninsula continues to measure political and social change through such liberal tropes as freedom, neo-liberal economics, technocratic government, and the rational autonomous individual (as opposed to tribes, sects, etc.). Yet within the Arabian Peninsula itself, liberalism has undergone a profound transformation from a discourse of critique and intellectual creativity to that of conservative power itself. For instance, these monarchies have not only turned on religious authorities, but have even deployed a liberal rhetoric of religious pluralism, moderation, and individualism to combat them. They have plans to re-engineer working life around the principles of technocracy, competitiveness and deregulation, just as these neoliberal orthodoxies come under sustained attack, including by right-wing populists and ethno-nationalists.

Work on the Arabian Peninsula remains largely insulated from pressing global debates around the resurgence of Keynesian economics, the global climate emergency, conservative ideology and popular protests. This year's Conference takes the confluence of liberalism's global critique, and its selective embrace in the Arabian Peninsula, as the starting point to ask new

questions about the region and how such a conjuncture can reconfigure cultural, political, and historical research:

- To what extent have liberal teleologies of progress and development underwritten dominant academic literature on the Arabian Peninsula? What might these paradigms conceal in terms of relations of power?
- How can we make sense of the ideological decline of Islamism in the Arabian Peninsula?
- What does the selective embrace of liberalism by regimes mean for how we theorise them?
- How might these changes represent more than mere strategies of public image management?
- Does the Anthropocene have a place in research on the Arabian Peninsula?
- How can new global histories of liberalism, revolution or empire help re-frame the Arabian Peninsula's history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
- Does the contemporary critique of liberalism (in both politics and economics) offer an opportunity to re-evaluate what a progressive politics might look like in the Arabian Peninsula?

We welcome contributions from the following disciplines:

- Political economy
- Political philosophy/theory
- History (20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries)
- Gender studies
- Anthropology and sociology
- Political science and international relations
- Migration and diaspora studies

### **How to apply**

Interested parties are asked to submit paper proposals (abstracts of 300-400 words), as well as a full CV including affiliation and contact details, before **6 April 2020** to [gulfconference@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:gulfconference@exeter.ac.uk). Candidates whose abstracts are accepted will be notified by 27 April 2020.

### **Practical Information**

All presenters whose papers are accepted for the conference will have their accommodation arranged and paid for by the organisers, as well as all lunches and the Conference dinner. Unfortunately we are unable to cover travel expenses to and from Exeter.

We want to make this conference as accessible as possible for new parents, so please let us know if you require help with child-care arrangements during the Conference.