

MESA 2023 panels
(in chronological order)

1) [Session I-17] De-exceptionalizing the Arabian Peninsula: Pirates, Pilgrims, Archives

(Thursday, November 2 at 3pm)

Chair/Presenter: James Onley (American University of Sharjah)

- Gulf History and Colonial Archives in Britain and India by James Onley (American U. of Sharjah)
- Prohibited Pilgrims: Smuggling to and through 20th Century Hajj by Bret Windhauser (CUNY)
- The Shipborne Shadow of Empire: Discourses of Piracy in British-Ottoman Relations in the Late Nineteenth-Century Persian Gulf by Lawson Pace (Central European U.)
- Genesis of the Gulf Emirate: Contemporary Conceptions of an Arab Polity, 1766 – 1810 by Saleh Alkhulaifi (U. of Cambridge)
- A Tolerated Terror: Raḥmah bin Jābir and the Forging of a Global Gulf by Nicholas Roberts (Norwich U.)

2) [Session I-21] Social Transformations in the Gulf: Identity and Belonging

(Thursday, November 2 at 3pm)

Chair: Lauren Clingan (Princeton U.)

- Migrant Menus: Placemaking and Belonging in Dubai's Food History by Salma Serry (U. of Toronto)
- Royal Customs, Traditions, and the Role of the Female Royals: A Comparative Analysis of Qatar and Thailand by Vorachai Israsena Pichitkanjanakul (Qatar U.)
- An Ethnography of Social Transformation in Saudi Arabia by Philippe Thalmann (U. of Cambridge)
- More Than a National Dress: The Symbolic Context of Abaya by Hee Eun Kwon
- Belonging Beyond Citizenship: Relationality in Dubai by Joud Alkorani (Radboud University Nijmegen)

3) [Session II-11] Environmental Crisis and Political Movements in MENA & the Indian Ocean World

(Thursday, November 2 at 5.30pm)

Organizer: Wilson Chacko Jacob (Concordia U.)

Discussant: Michael Christopher Low (U. of Utah)

SUMMARY:

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a massive reordering of the world. In some ways it was a culmination of three centuries of change in the ways humans interacted

with nature and with each other; in other ways, it was the product of more abrupt changes to the ways in which people made and exchanged things. This transformation as experienced in “the Middle East” has typically been studied through the lens of social and political history, and more recently cultural and gender history. The themes of European imperialism, “defensive developmentalism,” nascent anti-colonial nationalisms, capitalist incorporation, and religious revival have tended to dominate the narratives of Middle East history. Underpinning and driving these disparate narratives is the historian’s quest for locating human agency within and often against the intangible and inanimate structures determining conditions of life. An environmental “turn” in Middle East historiography has yet to happen even as several excellent monographs have appeared in recent years. Alan Mikhail has made perhaps the most forceful “argument for Middle East environmental history” to refresh some of the older thematic approaches and to demonstrate their global dimensions while avoiding the persistent problem of exceptionalism. Heeding his call, this panel seeks to explore the potentials and limits of environmental history for the revision of Middle East and Indian Ocean history as central to global history. The nineteenth-century transformation is traceable through, and was perhaps most intensely felt in, the changed relationship of various groups (pastoralists, peasants, urban dwellers, pilgrims, etc.) and individuals (saints, merchants, reformers, rebels, etc.) to the state. These histories have been and continue to be written, and they showcase multiple perspectives. We polemically submit that despite the claims of social history to represent subaltern voices, it is rarely an ordinary person from among the peasantry, pastoralists, or urban poor who is speaking; moreover, their “culture” remains opaque. There are obvious archival limitations that explain this lacuna. However, as environmental historians have argued, exploring human ecology has the potential of making legible lifeworlds previously sketched in skeletal outline if at all. The papers on this panel use the methods of environmental history to make the local and the global interactions that redefined the ends of life in the nineteenth century appear in vivid color, without one subduing the other. In the process, “the Middle East” as region is opened up to reveal the impact of transregional and planetary forces.

- The Sayyid vs El Niño: Dhofar and the Indian Ocean World, 1875-1879 by Wilson Chacko Jacob (Concordia U.)
- The Sheikh Ubeydullah Rebellion: A Political Uprising during the High Days of Famine in Kurdistan by Zozan Pehlivan (U. of Minnesota)
- The Voices of Mosul’s “Marsh People”: An Environmental History of Oil Exploration and Building the “Northwest Passage” to India in Late-Nineteenth-Century Iraq by Conor Kilroy (Concordia U.)

4) [Session II-21] [New Horizons in the 21st Century Gulf’s Cultural Production](#)

(Thursday, November 2 at 5.30pm)

Organizer: Thomas Fibiger (Aarhus U.)

SUMMARY:

This panel will focus on new developments in the cultural scene in the Arab Gulf countries. This scene is currently undergoing significant changes, opening up for new cultural and geographic horizons and in particular a renewed attention to the Indian Ocean world. The panel asks how this may affect the cultural scene more broadly, both within the Gulf region and beyond. In the first two decades of the 21st Century in particular Qatar and the UAE fostered large-scale museum projects with characteristic spectacular architecture designed by international architects, such as the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha (2008), the Louvre Abu Dhabi (2017), the National Museum of Qatar (2019) and the Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi (under construction). More recently the focus has shifted from establishing such grand scale globalized (and arguably westernized) institutions to a regional focus that foregrounds relationships within the Indian Ocean world and not least religion. This focus is evident in revised presentations in established museums and new museums as well as cultural and academic projects addressing this geographic and cultural territory. This also includes attention to other voices in Gulf cultural history and cultural production, global and transregional as well as local voices. The panel will contribute with case studies of individual projects and countries that together highlight the importance of this new direction for the Arabian Gulf. The panel does not only focus on museums but also on cultural production more broadly, eg. art fairs and galleries, cultural events and cultural management and bureaucracy. The panel will examine how this new regionally focused agenda is being materialized and the motives behind it through an examination of key case studies in Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

- Religion-as-Civilization in Global Gulf Museums: The Exhibition Narrative at the Louvre Abu Dhabi by Thomas Fibiger (Aarhus U.)
- Africa, Music, and Heritage in the Gulf by Thabati Willis (Carleton College)
- Al-Mirwiyat al-‘Arabiyya fi Matahif al-Jazira (Arabian Narratives in Arabian Museums) by Fergus Reoch (Barker Langham)

5) [Session IV-19] [Digital Divides and Censored Stories: Contemporary Challenges to Arab Media Access](#)

(Friday, November 3 at 11am)

Organizer: Andrew Leber (Tulane U.)

SUMMARY:

How are Arab states, citizens, and civil society responding to an increasingly troubled and constantly changing media environment? In recent years, authoritarian tactics of repression and censorship have intersected with more prosaic concerns of building readership and sustaining revenue for media outlets, threatening already-constrained media independence across the region. A core contention of this panel is that access to shared media is important to residents of Arab countries even under present constraints, and that current dynamics threaten to further erode access to critical perspectives on politics and society in public forums for debating issues of mutual interest. Multiple papers in this panel draw on the words of Arab journalists, columnists, and authors in the Arabian Peninsula—in interviews and their own

writings—to outline the journalistic ethics and ethos that has sustained a meaningful role for print and broadcast media in contexts such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, albeit a role that is being crowded out politically by autocratic rulers bent on controlling public discourse and undermined economically by “Western” technologies and transnational media firms seeking to monopolize advertising revenue. Furthermore, as regional governments use a range of online and offline tools and tactics to shape access to information, some media outlets, social commentators, and literary authors aim to sidestep these with varying degrees of success. For example, while direct government censorship plays a significant and continuing role in shaping media content, adept authors likewise evolve techniques for writing in code or co-producing new discursive contours of the permissible in response to the government’s attempts at control. Digital media platforms of various types and from a multitude of origins also hold the potential to serve as alternatives to legacy media or government rhetoric in the region, however digital divides aligned with age, education, or nationality risk perpetuating existing offline inequalities by restricting access to information and limiting the range of perspectives and outcomes otherwise made possible through such technologies. Drawing on different, yet complementary media forms and methodologies, the presenters seek to demonstrate how media producers, consumers, and governments are each seeking to cope with the ever-shifting lines of today’s evolving Arab mediascape.

- Murder as a Signal of Censorship: Jamal Khashoggi and Repression of Saudi Op-Ed Columnists by Andrew Leber (Tulane U.)
- Shades of Literary Censorship in Kuwait by Ildiko Kaposi (Independent)
- Identifying Communities of Exclusion in Kuwait’s Digital Media Landscape by Fahed Al-Sumait (American U. of Kuwait)

6) [Session IV-23] [Anti-Colonial Resistance Across the Arab Gulf](#)

(Friday, November 3 at 11am)

Organizer: Erica Augenstein (U. of Houston)

Discussant: Samah Selim (Rutgers, State University of New Jersey)

SUMMARY:

Anti-Colonial Resistance Across the Arab Gulf Rather than being codified in canonical texts, anti-colonial revolutionary theorization often emerges in the path of on-the-ground political practice. In the Arab Gulf of the 1950s - 1970s, a diverse array of revolutionary parties, movements, and ideas precipitated seismic shifts in the political and social structures of the region. This political environment unfolded through a network of connections to struggles in an internationalist anti-colonial milieu. The written record of the Arab Gulf’s revolutionary moment emerges from the pens of many activists writing in various venues. In this record, the literary form—through novels, translations, and periodicals—recurs as a vessel of revolutionary theory and analysis. This panel seeks to consider anti-colonial literary production of the Arab Gulf as a political and theoretical corpus that captures this history of the region and its role in the global history of revolution. In Oman, Abdullah al-Tai and Ahmad al-Zubaidi used the novel to capture anti-colonial revolutionary histories and deconstruct the social base of

resistance through their work published throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Al-Tai and al-Zubaidi used the novel to galvanize political consciousness as anti-colonial revolution unfolded. Decades later, Sonallah Ibrahim's novel, Warda (2000), struggles with the long shadow of the Dhufar revolution. Ibrahim uses the literary form to grapple with the remembrance of this revolutionary period and to understand its ghost in the present. The global fabric of twentieth-century anti-colonial struggle reflects in the winding paths of literary production through translation. The 2014 Malayalam translation of Ghassan Kanafani's Rijal fi al-Shams [Men in the Sun] (1962) –which captures the plight of Palestinian refugees in the Arab Gulf–brings a new readership to a revolutionary novel already bound to its political stakes both through shared anti-colonial resistance and experiences of labor migration into the Arab Gulf. Migration into the Gulf brought political subjects and organizational forms which became integral to the revolutionary path of the region. In Kuwait, the Palestinian political subjects built some of the region's strongest opposition movements, relying heavily on published literary production and theory. The literary record of anti-colonial revolution in the Arab Gulf reveals the political and social fabric of the region. The revolutions and activism that rocked the region in the mid-twentieth century sprung from a regionally and globally integrated population and environment. The legacies of this period continue to shape historical memory and imagined futures for the region.

- Publishing the Revolution: Palestinians and Anti-Colonial Literature in the Arab Gulf, 1950s - 1970s by Erica Augenstein (U. of Houston)
- Necessary Impossibilities: Activist Translations of Anti-Colonial Arabic Literature into Malayalam by Ibrahim Badshah (U. of Houston)
- Spectres of Revolution: The Spectral Politics of Resistance in Sonallah Ibrahim's "Warda" by Iqra Raza (U. of Houston)
- Revolution in Omani Memory: Rethinking Anti-Colonial Resistance in the Work of the "Green Mountain Angels" and "A Woman from Dhofar" by Said Al Hashimi (U. of Houston)

7) [Session V-8] [US-Gulf Cultures of Empire](#)

(Friday, November 3 at 1.30pm)

Organizers: Neha Vora (Lafayette College) and Natalie Koch (Syracuse U.)

SUMMARY:

Over the past century, the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula have been deeply impacted by imperial influence from the United States. Existing scholarship on US empire in the region has given special attention to entangled interests of oil and security, showing how the US state and corporations have approached the region with strategic ambitions to more easily extract profit, dominate the broader Middle East, and perpetuate war. Indeed, empires are characteristically defined by logics of extraction. But they are also built on cultural exchange. The cultural dimensions of US-Gulf relations are the focus of this interdisciplinary panel – collectively exploring what we call “cultures of empire” in the Gulf region. Cultures of empire represent the diverse structures that underpin US-Gulf imperial relations, and how they both build and

rely on subjects and knowledges that reproduce US hegemony. Bringing together anthropologists, geographers, and historians, we explore the quotidian ways in which empire manifests in everyday practices, rhetorics, and forms of subjectification. In doing so, we approach US imperial power through sites of study that often are either severed from political economic studies of oil and security or treated as merely the realm of Gulf Arab and/or US cultural and social life. The papers in our panel consider US-Gulf cultures of empire in spaces inside and outside of the Gulf, paying particular attention to the role of technological innovation, education, and expertise. They explore geographies and cultures of empire by focusing on sites such as missionary work, petro-education, human resources management, geo-engineering projects, and desalination technologies. Taken together, these papers argue that these areas are not “soft power” in relation to the juggernauts of US oil companies and the US military, but rather essential locations through which empire is naturalized, contested, and reproduced.

- Cultures of Arid Empire: US-Gulf Imperial Entanglements and Their Desert Imaginaries by Natalie Koch (Syracuse U.)
- Americans’ Technological Empire in Arabia by Karine Walther (Georgetown U. Qatar)
- Security through Social Change: American Management Practices at Oil Projects in the Arabian Peninsula, 1940s to 1960s by Andrea Wright (College of William & Mary)
- Gulf Petro-Education, Climate Action, and US Empire by Danya Al-Saleh (U. of Washington) and Neha Vora (Lafayette College)
- Copying California: The Water Prince and the Cold War Roots of Saudi Mega-Projects by Michael Christopher Low (U. of Utah)

8) [Session V-15] [Race in the Maghrib and the Arabian Peninsula – Comparisons, Connections, Contestations](#)

(Friday, November 3 at 1.30pm)

Organizer: Catey Boyle (Harvard U.)

Chair: Mandana E. Limbert

SUMMARY:

This panel contends that critical attention to histories of race formation and present-day iterations of race can shed greater light on empire, statecraft, and inequality in the Maghrib and the Arabian Peninsula. This panel unfolds from the premise that race is a constructed, and thus, unstable analytical category – to paraphrase theorist Stuart Hall, it is a fictive concept with material consequences. How have conceptions of race in the Arabian Peninsula and Maghrib converged with other categories of difference-making, such as gender, sexuality, dress, religion, lineage, ethnicity, age, ability, and class? How have transregional connections in the Maghrib and Arabian Peninsula produced, reproduced, and/or transformed racial ideologies? This panel has two principle themes of inquiry and spans the sixteenth to twenty-first centuries. The first focuses on how the category of race has indexed political economies

of early-modern and colonial empires as well as contemporary nation-states. One paper analyzes how sugar production under the sixteenth-century Sa'dian dynasty shaped the methods and networks of the broader Northwest African and Atlantic worlds. The second contends that the 20th-century political economy of bondage crystallized bonds between the African continent and the Arabian Peninsula under French empire. In the present, a third paper examines how UAE residents perceive belonging and rights through the lens of race. And a fourth investigates how ideologies of "racial purity" in present-day Yemen have been exacerbated by war, determining access to labor, education, and social integration. The second theme complements the first: here papers focus on how popular ideas about race have transformed at the ideological crossroads of the local, national, and transregional. One paper argues that race as a social marker of genealogy in 18th-century Ottoman Tunis shifted toward the phenotypical by the early 19th century through informal European imperial intervention. The other traces how cinematic performances of the "Western Other" in 1940s Egyptian films shifted in the Nasser era to reflect nationalist homogeneity via race, class, and masculinity. This panel's broad regional and historical span promises to uncover how race formation has been central to the political economies and exclusionary practices of empires and nation-states from the sixteenth century to the present. Ultimately, by focusing on regions that are often relegated to the discursive frontiers of "the Middle East," this panel contends that critical examination of race formation in the Arabian Peninsula and Maghrib can generatively challenge the geographic, political, and cultural bounds of the field.

- Sites of Servitude: Transregional Slave Trades, Difference, and Belonging in Tunis (1736-1895) by Catey Boyle (Harvard U.)
- "The Khawaga Complex" - Representations of the European Other on Egyptian Screens by Omar Sayfo (Utrecht U.)
- Deserving Citizens and Migrants: Shifting Parameters of Race and Nation in the UAE by Idil Akinci (U. of Edinburgh)
- Bonds and Bondage between the Sahara and the Arabian Peninsula, 1920-1960 by Faisal Abdullah Abualhassan (John Hopkins U.)

9) [Session VI-6] [Rethinking Critical Security Studies](#) [Roundtable]

(Friday, November 3 at 4pm)

Organizer/Discussant: Sami Hermez (Northwestern U. in Qatar)

SUMMARY:

This roundtable emerges from ongoing discussions situated in Doha, Qatar around critical understandings of security. In 2022, the Beirut School of Critical Security Studies, under the direction of the Arab Council for Social Sciences launched a critical security hub in Doha, in partnership with Northwestern University in Qatar's Institute for Advanced Study of the Global South. This hub is meant to bring scholars together to think discourses of security and insecurity anew, to create an interdisciplinary space and conversation situated in the Arab region, and to grapple with how to work on such issues from within securitized places and as researchers situated in the region. Critical security, as any discourse that takes a critical turn,

is meant to speak against the grain, to be contrapuntal, and a way to write and think from the margins with the intent of building a discourse that is itself multiple and wide ranging (Abboud et al.). To think of (in)security contrapuntally means to take seriously a combination of disciplinary backgrounds, some of which have traditionally tackled questions of security while others that have only dealt with the concept tangentially. In this roundtable, scholars working from a number of disciplinary backgrounds, and in a year-long conversation with each other, will discuss their emerging ideas around meanings of security—its discourses, affects, experiences, and economies. Working in fields of law, critical migration studies, gender studies, political economy, and anthropology, the speakers will open a conversation on what a theory and practice of critical security might look like from global south spaces. They will converse across disciplines to think together about how, for example, a third world approach to international law might open up new relations between law and security? How can we understand migration if security were not the principle ordering tool by which we understood the flow of people? How might politics entrench armed conflicts and war economies? Or how might an attention to narratives help us understand the meaning of security in people’s everyday lives? Together, speakers will put law, gender, migration, economics, and narrative structures in dialogue as they rethink concepts of security and challenge the field of critical security studies. Importantly, this roundtable seeks to open and expand a conversation with an audience to further the overall project and bring new scholars into the network.

- Critical Security Studies and Gulf Migration by Zahra Babar (Georgetown U. Qatar)
- Conceptualizing Gulf (In)Security Using Narrative and Affect by Haya Al-Noaimi (Northwestern U. in Qatar)
- Third World Approaches to International Law and Security by Noha Aboueldahab (Georgetown U. Qatar)
- War Economies and Insecurity in Syria by Omar Dahi (Hampshire College)

10) [Session VI-26] [Gulf Studies: Advances and Shortcomings](#)

(Friday, November 3 at 4pm)

- A Brutal Opening: Embrace, Ambivalence and Betrayal in Saudi Arabia by Gwenn Okruhlik
- Masculinity Challenged: Emotional Responses to State Support for Women’s Employment in the United Arab Emirates by Lauren Clingan (Princeton U.)
- The State, Business, and Social Relations: A Case Study of Non-Citizen Entrepreneurs in Qatar by Khushboo Shah (Georgetown U. Qatar)
- Why Gulf Studies? by Md Mizanur Rahman (Qatar U.) and Mirdef Alqashouti (U. of Durham/Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

11) [Session VII-20] [Revisiting the Gulf’s Anti-Imperialist Currents in the Twentieth Century](#)

(Saturday, November 4 at 8.30am)

Organizer: Talal al-Rashoud (Kuwait U.)

Discussant: Crystal Ennis (Leiden U.)

SUMMARY:

Throughout the twentieth century, the Arab Gulf states witnessed successive waves of movements that challenged British (and later American) hegemony, shaping the region's political and cultural life. In the 1910s and 1920s, intellectuals influenced by Islamic modernism and the Arab nahda took the first steps towards fostering an anti-imperialist discourse and novel modes of activism. Between the 1930s and 1960s, this trickle steadily grew into a torrent, with mass movements inspired by Pan-Arabism emerging in several Gulf states. The 1967 Arab defeat led to the rise of new strategies and paradigms in the form of Islamism and revolutionary Marxism, most notably represented in the Dhofar Revolution. Much of the academic literature on the Gulf has, until recently, overlooked or downplayed this history. This can partly be attributed to the long-established notions of "empire by invitation," whereby local rulers voluntarily submitted to British tutelage, and a region isolated from external influences before the exploitation of oil. Underlying these views has been an overwhelming reliance on British colonial archives to the exclusion of local Arabic language sources. This panel seeks to build on the expanding literature that challenges these widely held perspectives, highlighting the long-standing and multifaceted history of anti-imperialism in the Gulf. In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars influenced by Marxism and Arab nationalism penned the first studies critiquing imperialist influence in the region and/or detailing resistance to it. This topic subsequently fell out of fashion in the field of Gulf studies, yet a new wave of scholarship in the last decade has rekindled interest in it. This literature highlights the Arab nationalist and leftist movements that spearheaded the fight against imperialism in the region through mass mobilization, labor activism, intellectual production, and armed struggle. Despite these advances, there remains a need for analysis of the Gulf's various anti-imperialist currents across time and space. This would raise novel questions for the study of the region. For instance, how would the foregrounding of anti-imperialist politics alter the conventional, state-focused periodization of Gulf history? What spatial configurations emerge from the study of popular movements that traversed colonially constructed borders? What insights can an anti-imperialist lens bring to the study of topics such as gender and social history? Bringing together scholars of history, international relations, and political economy, this panel aims to spark such discussion with a focus on the cases of Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

- Approaching 'the International' of Arab Nationalism: Origins, Vectors and the Case of Bahrain under British Colonialism by Hsinyen Lai (U. of St Andrews)
- The Many Faces of Jamila – Women and Lineages of Revolt in Bahrain by Kanwal Hameed (German Orient Institute of Beirut)
- The 'Political Commodity': Oil and US-Middle East Relations in the Historiography of 'Abdulrahman Munif by Omar AlShehabi (U. of Leeds)
- The Kuwaiti Press and Third World Liberation Struggles during the 1960s by Fadi Kafety (U. of Houston)
- Arabia's Anti-Colonial Hub: Kuwait and the Bahraini Nationalist Movement (1956-1966) by Talal al-Rashoud (Kuwait U.) and Wafa Alsayed (GUST)

12) [Session VIII-29] [The Politics of Trade and Investment in the New Gulf](#)

(Saturday, November 4 at 11am)

Chair: Tobias Zumbraegel (Heidelberg U.)

- The Political Economy of Hosting Major Sports Events in the GCC: the Case of Qatar and the 2022 FIFA World Cup by Suzanne Morrison (Zayed University Abu Dhabi)
- Chinese-Saudi Economic Relations: Uneven Growth and Aspirational Collaboration by Robert Mogielnicki (AGSIW)
- What Drives Saudi Arabia's Foreign Aid? Comparative Evidence on the Role of Geostrategy, Economics, and Values by Narayani Sritharan (College of William & Mary)
- The Tail Wagging the Dogs? Comparing the Influence-Building of the Gulf States in the US and China by Mate Szalai

13) [Session IX-19] [How Islamists Cope with Football: Qatar as a Transformative Event?](#)

(Saturday, November 4 at 3pm)

Organizer: Dag Tuastad (U. of Oslo)

SUMMARY:

Islamism has for nearly fifty years constituted not only the strongest political opposition movement in the Middle East, but also the strongest cultural movement. Yet Islamists have had problems coping with popular quests for fun and entertainment, as Asef Bayat noted in his "Life as politics". One telling example of this is football, the world's largest sport, tremendously popular throughout the Middle East, while regarded as morally corrupt by many Islamist clerics. The lack of adaptation to both local and global cultures of football has deeply alienated many Middle Easterners, especially young people. Recently, as in the discussion on post-Islamism by Bayat, Olivier Roy and others, questions have been raised on whether Islamism as a hegemonic ideological and social movement is waning in the region. Post-Islamism or not, we will argue that a tendency towards re-considering football can be observed in the region, and furthermore, that football have become a field of increased tension between Salafism and wasatism, main stream Islamism. The World Cup in Qatar 2022, the first ever held in a Middle Eastern and Muslim country, has further aggravated this tension. The wasatism trend is towards reinterpreting football according to the principle of maslaha - public interests, the paramount importance of preserving unity among Muslims. Obstructing peoples' access to football is considered a violation of maslaha. The World Cup in Qatar was in this regard in the Muslim world largely considered an event showing the benefits of being in a position to control and enforce moral norms within the football sphere, and at the same time exhibit public joy and pleasure within a Muslim framework. Thus, we argue that from striving to minimize the role of football in the umma main forces of political Islam have adjusted to, increasingly endorsed, or muted opposition to female football, the mixing of sexes among

spectators, the exposure of bare thighs of players, excessive partisanship and fanaticism in favor of a team, the missing of obligatory prayers and the like. The cases include main forces of political Islam: Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood as well as political-ideological trends in Iran and Saudi Arabia. Methodologically the papers are based on local fieldwork while also including method of modern history.

- How Ritual and Politics Intersects in Hizbollah’s Relation to Football by Dag Tuastad (U. of Oslo)
- Soccer, Islamism and the Good Muslim by Bjorn Olav Utvik (U. of Oslo)
- Football, Religion and Politics – Contested Narratives from the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar by Hans K Hognestad (University of South-Eastern Norway)
- The Contested Field of Women’s Football in Saudi Arabia (2005 – 2015) by Charlotte Lysa (U. of Oslo)

14) [Session IX-22] Haunted Futurities: Cases from the Arab Gulf States

(Saturday, November 4 at 3pm)

Organizer: Esraa Al-Muftah (U. of British Columbia)

Discussant: Talal Al-Rashoud (Kuwait U.)

SUMMARY:

This panel explores the notion of “haunted futurity” through the research of four academics writing from within the Arab Gulf States (AGS). Through their graduate research and/or postdoctoral work, these scholars expose the ways in which “the past casts a shadow over (im)possible futures” in the AGS (Ferreday & Kuntsman, 2011). The different research projects are from diverse disciplines— sociology, literary and educational studies. Despite this, they all find a fleeting past haunting their research and leading them in search of “impossible memories and unwritten histories” either in their fieldwork or literary analysis (Ferreday & Kuntsman, 2011). The papers use various theoretical and conceptual tools, some purposefully, but others emerge from the scholars’ messy fieldwork experience and/or as a result of the literary fissures they come across. Hence, the panel contributes to broadening methodological and analytical ways to understand the AGS from the margins and silence(d), especially amid the current resurgence of state-led oral history projects. To do that, the panelists address different topics and historical moments of the AGS’s past. Topics span from the representation of the pearling traditions in literary narratives on the region to labor movements of the 1950s and 1960s in Qatar. They also examine different settings, such as the erasure of the black girl in modern schools in (post)colonial Bahrain, to institutional erasures of Third-Worldist and anticolonial histories at Qatar University. Overall, these presentations bring to light not only marginalized his/herstories, but also the mechanisms by which these narratives have been erased, reappropriated, and physically destroyed in institutional archives and from future generations’ imaginaries. This remembering of the forgotten is not a reminiscent activity but rather a political act grounded in the material experience of the scholars in an ever-evolving space. Through the practice of exposing the ghosts, silences, or

erasures in the dominant narratives, the authors are driven by a commitment to more inclusive horizons in the region.

- Institutional Erasures: The Case of Internationalization at Qatar University by Esraa Al-Muftah (U. of British Columbia)
- Searching for Za'faranaḥ: The (Im)possibilities of Black Girlhoods in (Post)colonial Bahrain by Sara Musaifer (New York University Abu Dhabi)
- Contested Cultural Representations of the Maritime History of the Gulf by Tareq Alrabei (GUST)
- Silencing Processes as a Form of Historical Erasure: Histories of Qatar's Social Movements by Maryam AlHajri (U. of Edinburgh)

15) [Session X-25] MENA in the New International Order: The Politics of Interests, Norms, and Shifting Alliances

(Saturday, November 4 at 5.30pm)

Chair: Leila Farsakh (U. Massachusetts Boston)

- Securing Status: Why Qatar and the UAE Support U.S. Policies in the Middle East by Tyler Parker (U. Idaho)
- The Impact of Qatar-United Arab Emirates Rivalry on Libyan and Tunisian Politics Since 2011 by Pietro Marzo (Teluq U.)
- The United Arab Emirates and the Security Crisis in the Sahel by Yacouba Gnegne (UAE National Defense College)
- Liberal Norm Contestation in the Periphery: Assessing Turkey's Peacemaking Discourse in the Mediterranean by Esra Dilek (Bilkent U.)

16) [Session XI-2] Reorienting the Middle East: The Gulf as Method between Area and Film/Media Studies [Roundtable]

(Sunday, November 5 at 8.30am)

Organizer/Chair: Dale Hudson (NYU Abu Dhabi)

SUMMARY:

Stories of cutting-edge film production facilities, generous tax incentives, and lavish film festivals often dominate perceptions of film and digital media on the Arabian Peninsula, but there is a much longer and more complicated history that connects it with the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean. This history extends to the present in which many Gulf states have heterogeneous populations of citizens and residents, whose perspectives have often been marginalized. This workshop proposes that by focusing on film and digital media in the Gulf, new frameworks, which we call "the Gulf as method," become evident. Many films that circulate in Western film festivals offer a highly selective image of the Gulf that largely conforms to Western-defined regions in area studies and Western-defined national, regional,

international, and world cinemas in film studies. As a consequence, the Gulf often only comes into focus in relation to autocratic governance, kafala, “petrodollars,” rentier system, fundamentalism, “veiled” women. The same phenomenon extends also to television and visual arts. This roundtable reorients scholarships and debates on film and digital media in the Middle East by looking to the Gulf for how it can help us to unsettle assumptions. It does so by recognizing the Gulf as a fluid and transcultural space, whose interconnecting histories and migrating cultures as a conduit between multiple overlapping cultures whose complex identity exceeds the limiting imagination of regions and nation state borders in area and film studies. Panelists consider a wide variety of material (cinemas, films audiocassette letters, television performance art, videos on file-sharing platforms) that focus on what can be learned by considering oft-forgotten spaces between regions and disciplines in film and visual media.

- “My presentation will focus on the role of film and new media artwork in creating networks of artistic critique that stretch from the Arabian Peninsula to South Asia as well as to Europe...” by Elizabeth Derderian (College of Wooster)
- “Over the two last decades, Meshal al-Jaser has emerged as one of Saudi Arabia’s and the Gulf’s most important artistic forces with global reach...” by Sean Foley (Middle Tennessee State University)
- “Contemporary discursive and visual representations of slavery in the Persian Gulf are often limited to state narratives and heritage project initiatives...” by Parisa Vaziri
- “Since the 1980s, numerous Gulf Cooperation Council cities have hosted film festivals by the Indian diaspora, including Doha, Dubai, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi...” by Bindu Menon (Azim Premji U.)

17) [Session XI-9] Past and Present Leaderships in the Arabian Peninsula. Historical and Conceptual Approach

(Sunday, November 5 at 8.30am)

Organizer/Chair: Javier Guirado (Georgia State U.)

Discussant: Michael Herb (Georgia State U.)

SUMMARY:

The Arabian Peninsula is witnessing a period of generational change in its leadership. From Oman to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or the United Arab Emirates, new leaders have taken over after the decades-long rule of their predecessors. Examples of this trend include Haitham bin Tariq, who became the Sultan of Oman in 2020 after the 50-year rule of Sultan Qaboos; Mohammed bin Salman, de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia since 2015 and the first to gather such power beyond the sons of the late King Abdulaziz; or Tamim of Qatar, who took over in 2013 after his father, Hamad, stepped down. What does this generational change mean for the Arabian Peninsula? Is it affecting its politics? This timely moment provides exceptional grounds for academic research about notions of leadership in the Arabian Peninsula, past and present. Such research addresses topics that range from the classic research question about the stability of the monarchies in the Middle East to studies on heritage and nation building, touching topics like civil society, opposition or lack of thereof, political parties, elite formation, domestic and

foreign policy as related to leadership, and questions regarding frameworks like rentier state theory or tribalism. How do all these notions relate to the development or change in leadership in the Arabian Peninsula? Does the new generation of leaders inform these research questions and topics in any different way? By focusing on a series of case studies across disciplines, this panel sheds light on narratives and performances of leadership in the Arabian Peninsula during the twentieth and twenty-first century. These studies include (i) a paper about social and political changes in Oman under Sultan Haitham, (ii) a historical account on the formation of a new social contract also in Qatar during the Global Sixties, (iii) a paper that asks about the role of tribal vs. ideological affinities in party politics in Kuwait, (iv) an empirical examination about the implications of the general election in Qatar, and (v) a study about elite dynamics and foreign policy, also in Qatar. Bringing innovative and empirical research, but also building up on the existing literature, this panel contributes to the discussion on leadership across disciplines and establishes new dialogues within Middle East studies, in particular regarding the Arabian Peninsula, engaging with debates in Political Science, Sociology, History, International Relations, and other allied fields.

- Qatar's 2021 Shura Council Elections: Implications for Citizen Inclusion and the New Leadership's Political Agenda by Luciano Zaccara (Qatar U.)
- Rulers and Ruled in Qatar. The Role of Society in the 1950s by Javier Guirado (Georgia State U.)
- The Power Resources of the Qatari Elite: Leadership and Foreign Policy in the Past Two Decades by Leticia Rodriguez (U. of Granada)
- Examining the Mobilizational Capacity of Tribes in Kuwait by Courtney Freer (Emory U.)

18) [Session XII-1] [Recovering the Politics of Kuwait: From Regional Margins to the Theoretical Mainstream](#) [Roundtable]

(Sunday, November 5 at 11am)

Organizer/Chair: Sean Yom (Temple U.)

SUMMARY

This roundtable explores the politics of Kuwait through a provocative entrée. Traditionally, Kuwait has seldom garnered mainstream academic interest; it is either overshadowed by larger MENA states like Egypt, or else framed as a marginal example of broader regional phenomena. For instance, Kuwaiti politics is often portrayed as an outgrowth of oil-rentierism, a type of outmoded monarchism, or an appendage to titanic geopolitical conflicts in the Gulf waged by powers like Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the US. The roundtable, however, adopts a radically different perspective: Kuwait is also a vivid site of domestic political contestation, and the puzzles of its national political life speak directly to the most important theories about power and governance within the social sciences. Studying Kuwaiti politics enables us to observe how governments form, institutions diverge, elections proceed, opposition organizes, citizenship operates, protests erupt, and social forces like women and youth mobilize for change. Kuwait is an autocracy, but its political order ranks as among the least repressive in

the MENA – which, in turn, allows the struggles and conflicts of its society play out in public. Yet, the field of Kuwaiti political studies remains small, and the country poorly understood. Gathering junior and senior specialists, this roundtable elevates research on Kuwait into the disciplinary mainstream. Its participants interrogate three questions. First, why is the study of Kuwaiti politics – from its legislative elections and ideological wranglings to its grassroots activism and Islamist movements – so marginalized in comparative political analysis? Second, which social, economic, and political issues in Kuwait have the most salient theoretical implications for outside scholars, and would make the country more legible outside the well-trodden canons of Gulf strategic studies and the oil-rentier paradigm? Third, how will Kuwaiti politics evolve over the coming decades? The country faces enormous challenges, among them tribal and communal rifts; inequality across class, citizenship, and gender; financial and market dysfunctions; indeterminate elections and electoral rules; and unstable governments that amplify indecisive leadership. How these issues play out will dramatically reshape Kuwait’s state and society. Moving beyond stale optics that ignore Kuwait’s fascinating politics, the roundtable will answer these questions by linking the accumulated knowledge of Kuwaiti specialists – in particular, political scientists, sociologists, and historians – with broader theoretical frameworks.

- “My framework situates Kuwait as a case of "semi-democracy" in the Arab world...” by Sean Yom (Temple U.)
- “Not only has Kuwait’s domestic political contestation and parliamentary affairs been marginalized...” by Yuree Noh (Rhode Island College)
- “The oil-rich Arab monarchies of the Gulf typically appear in the comparative politics literature as edge cases...” by Michael Herb (Georgia State U.)
- “In her seminal 2009 book *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf*, Nelida Fuccaro claims...” by Farah Al-Nakib (California Polytechnic State U.)

19) [Session XII-12] [Arabic Petrofictions](#)

(Sunday, November 5 at 11am)

Organizer: Rachel Green (U. of Massachusetts)

SUMMARY:

*In his 1991 review of Abdulrahman Munif’s *Cities of Salt*, entitled "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel," Amitav Ghosh ascribes the overall absence of serious literary fiction addressing oil to the fact that “the history of oil is a matter of embarrassment verging on the unspeakable, the pornographic.” Yet, while critical works such as Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer’s *Energy Humanities* (2017) regularly frame both Ghosh and Munif as foundational to the study of oil-in-literature and oil-in-culture, their engagement with the Arab world typically ends there. Exploring literary and artistic grapplings with the violent advent of oil and oil exploitation in the Arab Gulf and beyond, this panel brings together papers seeking to chart and problematize from an ecocritical perspective narratives of petromodernity, petroeconomy, petroarchive, statebuilding, empire, and the petrodollar standard. In so doing,*

it offers the Arabic text and cultural/economic space as a site both local and global for continued theorization of Petrofiction.

- Nāṣer al- Zafīr’s Kuwaiti Petrohistories by Rachel Green (U. of Massachusetts)
- Contemporary Gulf Art as Archive of the Petroeconomy by Shir Alon (U. of Minnesota)
- Rusty Parts: Gender Politics of the Upgrade in Deepak Unnikrishnan's "In Mussafah Grew People" by Nour Eldin Hussein (U. of Minnesota)
- Sticky Storytelling: Petrofiction and the Ecological Nomad by Yasmine Khayyat (Rutgers U.)

20) [Session XII-25] Contesting Boundaries of "Citizenship": Diasporas, Migrant Workers and Human Rights

(Sunday, November 5 at 11am)

Chair: Ahmed Khattab (Georgetown U.)

- The Deserving Diaspora: Citizenship and Voting Rights in the Homeland by Maleeha Iqbal (U. of Toronto)
- Migration and Citizenship Laws - The Arab Uprisings in Comparative Perspective by Ahmed Khattab (Georgetown U.)
- Demographic Imbalance and the National Identity in the UAE: Balancing Globalism, Tribalism and Nationalism by Joshua Snider (UAE National Defense College)
- Permeant Residency Law in Qatar Case Study: Second-Generation Arab Migrant Communities in Qatar (SGAM) by Musaab Alkhatib (U. of Western Sydney)
- Narratives of Migrants' Exclusion and Inclusion in Qatar by Zahra Babar (Georgetown U. Doha)

21) [Session XIII-6] The Return of the State: Revisiting State Formation in the 20th Century Gulf

(Sunday, November 5 at 1.30pm)

Organizer/Chair: Gabriel Young (NYU)

SUMMARY:

This panel revisits state formation in the twentieth-century Persian Gulf in light of the so-called “return of the state” in contemporary world politics. Euro-American commentary casts the worldwide state responses to ongoing ecological, economic, and public health crises as novel, but how do they appear from the perspective of a region like the Gulf where the state never seemed to go away? Inspired by such debates, here we present new research on state interventions in regimes of land and property, family planning, and finance in diverse historical and institutional contexts from across the twentieth-century Gulf. The first paper looks at agrarian reform efforts in late Hashemite Basra, and explains how these attempts to alienate state land helped consolidate the landlord role of the Iraqi state in the country's southern resource frontier during its transition from date agriculture to oil extraction. The

second paper moves to 1950s Khuzestan, arguing that domestic technocrats and foreign advisors to the Pahlavi regime pursued agrarian and industrial development policies in this province that had the unintended effect of expanding rather than constricting the regulatory powers of the Iranian state. The third paper zooms out to the regional scale in looking at family policy in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar, to investigate how parallel legal and policy efforts to promote a nuclear family model affected the influence of tribal ties in the twentieth-century Arabian Peninsula. The fourth paper uses the history of financial development in Kuwait between the 1950s and 1970s as a case study for discussing the relative autonomy of "small" states in the Gulf, identifying the political-economic and geopolitical pressures that led to the international orientation of domestic business groups and state-led investments in finance. This panel has two goals. First, it seeks to identify what was common to state intervention and statism as a social phenomenon and political project in the region, as well as what was distinct between Gulf states. Second, it aims to historicize the institutional features that scholarship operating in developmentalist and rentier-state theory modes take as explanatory factors for the contemporary dominance of Gulf states.

- Alienating State Property in Late Hashemite Basra: Agrarian Reform Before Revolution by Gabriel Young (NYU)
- Absolutely Small, Relatively Autonomous: The Political Economy of Small State Formation in the Persian Gulf by Rohan Advani (UCLA)
- Citizenship, Family Formation and State Building by Abrar Alshammari (Princeton U.)
- Oil, Land, and Practices of Development in Pahlavi Iran by Bitá Mousavi (NYU)

22) [Session XIII-17] [Western Indian Ocean Worlds: Imperial Legacies, Economic Networks, New Geographies](#)

(Sunday, November 5 at 1.30pm)

- Red Sea and Its Discontents: "Afrabia" in Middle East Studies by Sara Hussein (UCLA)
- Securing the Sultanate: Imperial Legacies and the Expansion of the Royal Oman Police in the 1970s by Richard Harrod (Washington U. in St Louis)
- Arabian-Indian Trade and Using Commodities to Expand Indian Ocean Historiography: Interdependent Political and Sociocultural Interests in Indian Empires and Gulf States over the Longue Durée by Peter Valenti (NYU)