



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 9

Gender and Identity in the Gulf: Cultural Constructions and Representations

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Abstract

The aim of this workshop is to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between gender, identity, and cultural production in the Gulf. The way in which gender and identity are both constructed and represented in the Gulf is an important and underrepresented area of academic inquiry. This workshop seeks to address this gap within the literature by analyzing and interrogating the socio-cultural production of gender and identity. It seeks to unpack the social, political, and economic structures and discourses that underpin gender identity construction in the Gulf, thus providing a framework from which to recognize the structures of power and ideologies that operate locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. In addition, the workshop aims to

explore how gender and identity intersect within the Gulf to produce distinct modes of cultural representation, both tangible and intangible. We are particularly interested in exploring how both masculinity and femininity are constructed and represented. The discussion of both masculine and feminine constructions and representations is important as it recognizes that these categories are not necessarily discrete but have intersections and disjunctions that are interconnected and interrelated. It is therefore essential that debates around gender and identity in the Gulf are framed within discussions that give voice to both masculine and feminine cultural constructions and representations.

Description and Rationale

The workshop will examine the ways in which gender is implicated in the display and production (and (re)production) of cultural representations and in the establishment and reflection of personal and national identities. The workshop is particularly interested in exploring the connections and disconnections between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ modes of identity production. Through a multi-disciplinary approach, workshop participants will exchange knowledge and challenge assumptions about gender and identity in the Gulf. The workshop will offer new perspectives on how gender and identity are culturally constructed and represented in the region. It will seek to identify the tensions and connections that have emerged within gender discourses in the Gulf. By framing these discourses within the wider debates around cultural production and education, the workshop will introduce and interrogate the intersections between gender, representation, and identity and how this relates to the economic, political, and social realities of the Gulf region. The workshop themes will be examined through two general frames of inquiry: Cultural Constructions and Cultural Representations.

Cultural Constructions

Under the theme of Cultural Constructions, workshop participants will examine the ways in which individual and national identities are shaped and produced. Recognizing that issues of gender are an important determinant in Gulf societies, contributions that consider gender as a factor within identity construction are particularly welcome. The theme of Cultural Constructions of identity can include both theory and practice-based research and can be approached from a variety of disciplines, including, but not limited to: the visual and performing arts, heritage studies, education, gender studies, history, anthropology, sociology and political sciences. By situating identity as a culturally constructed, rather than innate, concept the workshop seeks to interrogate both the act of that construction and its public and private reception from a variety of perspectives.

Cultural Representations

Once constructions of personal and national identity have been explored, the workshop will turn to a discussion of how these identities are represented through the broadly conceived lens of ‘culture’. Culture can be understood as a broad set of ‘common beliefs’ that connect (and disconnect) people. From common beliefs emerge social practices, which are “imbued with meaning” (Hall, 2013). Papers in this section of the workshop will raise and address issues of public representation of identity in settings as varied as the museum, the city, and the Internet. As with Cultural Constructions, in the Cultural Representations section we are again particularly interested in the intersection of gender and identity in establishing modes of representation. While this section suggests affinities with the study of visual culture, we have conceptualized the notion of representation more broadly and seek to engage scholars who approach the topic from other directions such as media studies, performing arts, literature, politics, anthropology and sociology, among others.

Scholarly Contribution

The ways in which gender, identity, and cultural representation interconnect and enmesh within Gulf societies is an area that has received little detailed interrogation within Gulf studies. By targeting attention and critical inquiry specifically on this topic, the workshop will offer an opportunity for the presentation of new lines of inquiry as well as foster connections and dialogue between scholars working in this area. The workshop will include participants from a broad array of disciplines with the aim of encouraging interdisciplinary modes of inquiry. By bringing together the three areas of gender, identity, and cultural representation and interrogating them in terms of their potential relationships rather than as discrete entities, we seek to broaden the conversation around the significance of these issues in the Gulf and to identify future avenues for related research. Additionally, as the Gulf Research Meeting comprises scholars from a wide variety of geographic locations and research specializations, it provides a unique opportunity to foster multidisciplinary dialogue on the suggested topics. This topic is underrepresented in the literature and we expect to draw contributions that can lead to new publications in the field.

Anticipated Participants

We are seeking paper submissions from academics, researchers, cultural practitioners, and postgraduate students who are conducting research around museums and heritage, artistic practices, identity and representation, literary studies, education, art historical theory and visual anthropology. Papers must focus on the Gulf region and will explore new perspectives on how gender, identity, and representation are manifested locally,

nationally, regionally and/or internationally. The workshop will take a multi-disciplinary approach, which could include perspectives and analyses drawn from the areas of art history, cultural heritage studies, cultural theory, museum studies, social anthropology, and sociology.

Workshop contributions include but are not limited to:

- Theoretical perspectives and methods of analysis that engage with gender, cultural representation and identity in the Gulf
- Case studies on the ways in which gender and identity are represented culturally in Gulf
- Cultural currency of representation and gender
- Politics of gender and identity

The framework of the workshop will explore a wide range of themes including but not limited to:

1. Cultural Constructions

- Gender Subjectivities
- Institutions and Gender Identity
- National Identity
- Transnational Identity
- Cultural Heritage and Identity
- Theoretical Frameworks
- Gender and Modernity in the Gulf
- Pedagogy and Education
- Gender and the Gulf Arab Workforce
- Feminism in the Gulf
- Masculinity in the Gulf

2. Cultural Representations

- Exhibitionary processes and gender
- Literature: Storytelling and the Gulf narrative traditions
- The Performing Arts
- Public Space
- Online and Social media
- Gulf Arab Artistic Practice
- The politics of representation in the Gulf
- Contemporary/Past Gender Identities and Representation
- Representations of the past and the command of the stereotype
- Attitudes towards gender in the visual representation of the Gulf

Workshop Director Profiles

Dr. Sabrina DeTurk is currently Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean in the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises at Zayed University in Dubai. From 2008 to 2014, she served as Associate Dean and Executive Director of Graduate Arts and Sciences at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, PA. Dr. DeTurk's research interests center on art as a form of social commentary, the contemporary visual culture of trauma and conflict, and the development of global art history curricula. Current projects include a comparative study of memorial architecture and memorial museums in the US, Europe and the Middle East as well as research on street art and visual culture in the Middle East and North Africa. Recent publications include "SALTWATER: The 14th Istanbul Biennial (*Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism*, 2016) and "The 'Banksy Effect' and Street Art in the Middle East" (*Street Art and Urban Creativity Scientific Journal*, 2015). Dr. DeTurk received her BA in the History of Art from Wellesley College (Wellesley, MA) and her MA and PhD in the History of Art from Bryn Mawr College (Bryn Mawr, PA).

Dr. Sarina Wakefield is an Adjunct Lecturer in the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises at Zayed University in Dubai. She has lectured at UCL Qatar and has worked on museum and heritage projects in the UK and the Kingdom of Bahrain. Dr. Wakefield's research interests center on critical heritage studies of the Gulf. She has a particular interest in 'trans-national' identity formation and representation, globalization, and migrant heritage and identity in the Gulf. Her PhD research focused upon the heritage industry in Abu Dhabi (UAE), and the inter-relationship between franchised and autochthonous heritage. Current projects include exploring the relationship between futurology and heritage in Dubai as well as research on how migrants use 'outdoor' heritage space in the Gulf States. She has published work in international journals and books relating to the museums and heritage sector in the Gulf. Recent publications include the co-edited volume *Museums in Arabia: Transnational Practices and Regional Processes* (Exell and Wakefield, London & New York: Routledge, 2016); 'Hybrid Heritage and Cosmopolitanism in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi' in *Reimagining Museums: Practice in the Arabian Peninsula*, edited by Pamela Erskine-Loftus (Edinburgh and Boston: MuseumsEtc, 2013). Dr. Wakefield received her BSc in Archaeology and her MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester (UK) and her PhD from the Open University (UK).

Prof. Dr. Laila Prager is a Senior Research Fellow in the Humanities Research Fellowship Program at NYU Abu Dhabi. She is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Hamburg (Germany) and a member of AGYA (Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities). Formerly, she worked as a researcher and senior

lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Münster and Leipzig (Germany). Dr. Prager's research interests center on the narrative representation and performance of the past among Bedouin societies in Syria and Jordan; kinship, cosmology, inter-religious conflicts, ritual healing, and migration among the Arab speaking Alawi/Alawite (Nusairy) society in South Eastern Turkey (Hatay/Çukurova) and Alawi migrant communities in Germany. Current projects include a comparative study of the various ways in which heritage is displayed, enacted, and appropriated at local, national, and transnational levels in the Gulf region as well as an interdisciplinary research project on the societal transformations emerging from the increase of major diseases in the Gulf region, such as diabetes type 2, thalassemia, and other genetically induced illnesses. Recent publications include (as guest editor of the Special Issue of Nomadic Peoples), *Reshaping Tribal Identities in the Contemporary Arab World*. 18 (2); *Bedouinity on Stage* (2014) *The Rise of the Bedouin Soap Opera (Musalsal Badawi) in Arab Television*. *Nomadic Peoples* 18 (2): 53-77 and "Displaying Origins: Heritage Museums, Cultural Festivals, and National Imageries in the UAE" *Horizons in Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (2015): 22-46. Dr. Prager received her MA and PhD degrees from the University of Münster, Germany.

Selected Readings

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