Salma Amer, SFU – “Egypt: Rebuilding a nation in transition”

Since 2011 young activists leading Egypt’s modern revolution have experienced structural violence and oppressive state practices by the elected Islamic regime and the re-elected old guard. Young liberal activists unidentified with political organizations have developed counter-strategies to survive their defeat. Particularly interesting, is their way of coming to terms with the political aftermath of the 2013 protests when the current regime ousted the Muslim Brotherhood President with the people’s support, only to crush the people’s demands for reform. This aftermath extends to ongoing repressive practices by the current regime extending its control onto the media and economy. By building a strong offline network of support where they express without censorship, the groups I’m focused on turned to unknowingly “healing the self” rather than retreating. Faced with their lack of ability to influence the political narrative in the face of terrorism threatening the region’s stability, they’ve shifted their focus onto creativity rather than conventional forms of political action. Scenes like the arts, conscious entrepreneurship, and alternative therapy methods have grown with high demand. In entering a space of fear and isolation, seeking refuge within these communities has become a tool to live through the present and alter the future. This research examines the effectiveness of these practices within Egypt’s socio-political structure while examining the possibility of reconciliation between the regime and the wider scale of Egypt’s marginalized communities. By exploring connection and elevation through the mind-body-spirit route; I look at how these practices grow and continue to work within the set limitations of expression presented in Egypt post the Arab Spring.

Isabelle McRae, Portland State University – “Structures of Sacrifice: Turkish Nation-Making and Narratives of Moral Value”

This paper explores how the Turkish state’s intervention in space and language reproduces national narratives of sacrifice. Ernest Renan’s and Benedict Anderson’s preliminary discourse on nation-making and imagined communities are taken as the structure with which to understand how sacrifice becomes a moral good. This paper focuses on the term martyrdom in Turkey as a case study, by examining the linguistic and social history of the term and its widening significance, and draw conclusions as to its ideological weight. Furthermore, this paper will look at how collective trauma and collective memory is reproduced through participation and state mechanisms, with regards to Henri Lefebvre’s theory on the state and its relation to productions of space. The paper argues that despite deep ideological divides—as exhibited most recently in the July 15th coup attempt—the underlying motivations for sacrificing oneself for the sanctity of the nation go back to founding ideals of the Turkish state and of nationalism itself.
Panel 2  
“Spaces and Soundscapes”  
Chair: Dr. Laura Marks, SFU

**Sholeh Mahlouji, UBC** – “Beyond the looking glass: an a/r/tographic inquiry”

This paper is based on an a/r/tography project, which was shaped around the mirror as an inquiry. In this paper, I mapped out traces of my research around mirrors, through living the multiple roles of Iranian teacher, artist, and researcher, and illustrated how each of the coexisting roles and the space in between, lead to a dynamic and generative spiral flow of thoughts where every art making, pedagogical practice, emergent understanding, shared idea, and reflection, connects/ adds/ relates to the whole process of meaning making. I looked in/into/through/beyond the mirror and explored unfolding insights which revealed relations between mirror and telling the truth, revealing the unseen, opening gates to the unknown and finally searching for the light. My methodology for this research is a/r/tography which offers a space for living inquiry through the practices of art making/ researching/ teaching while lingering in the “liminal spaces between a(artist) and r(researcher) and t(teacher)”(Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 902). Through this methodology, the inquirer constantly theorizes lived experiences and examines theories with new practices, carrying on the process of not knowing, looking for the not yet.


**Ellie Gooderham, SFU** – “The lasting effects of Islamization in the Iberian Peninsula”

The arrival of Islamic peoples to the Iberian Peninsula permanently shifted the cultural landscape of Southern Europe. Although Al-Andalus is a focus of research, history, and tourism in present-day Spain, Portugal does not share this legacy. This gap, in part, is due to the medieval Christian effort following their conquest to exhort control over the population through the near-complete destruction of Islamic architecture. This removed the Islamic identity from the physical landscape. Despite this hidden heritage, the influences of Islamic perspectives remain today. This paper discusses how the cultural and physical landscape of Portugal changed during and after the Medieval Islamic Period. Analysis of historical and archaeological records in conjunction with an examination of skeletal remains will provide a narrative of life in Medieval Islamic Portugal and how Islamization has had a lasting impact to the Portuguese landscape.

**Flora Klein, Whitman College** – “Gendered Soundscapes of the Ottoman Harem”

The Ottoman harem, frequently associated with heightened sexuality, was replete with complex, gendered spheres of influence. Overarching notions of a private, feminine “haremlik” and a public, masculine “selamlik,” maintained through Orientalist discourse, are increasingly challenged when considering the acoustic dimension of these spaces. Sound, as a mechanism of control, from müezzin chants to eunuch calls, falsil court music to deafening silence cultivated under heybet, both maintained and delegitimized power relations. The paper examines palace
architecture and textual sources to analyze how various groups in the seraglio recognized, responded to, and interacted with the sounds within, and how gendered soundscapes in turn altered other social and political forms, thereby challenging traditional Western ocular centrism in its analysis. I theorize three distinct auditory “channels” by which women maintained power, which effectively led women to act as an aural “Panopticon” in these masculine spaces. Rethinking gendered divisions of space, illuminating overlooked narratives, and drawing upon the burgeoning fields of affect theory and sound studies in Middle East historical scholarship, the paper phenomenologically engages with the post-Süleymanic harem and asks audiences to “listen” to the acoustic dimension of Ottoman history.

Panel 3
“Representations and Realities”
Chair: Dr. Martin Bunton, UVic

Harry Deng, SFU – “Orientalism and Land Disputes: The Mandate Perspective and the Jericho Sub-Districts of Buka’a and El-Fashka”

Traditional and mainstream narratives behind the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often create a very clear and rigid dichotomy between the European colonial powers and the Arab Palestinians that does not allow room for nuances within an extremely complicated conflict. In reality, however, there exists a complex web of relations between the Zionists, Bedouins, Palestinian towns people, and the British Mandatory power. Thus, in this paper I wanted to explore, not only the internal schisms that existed within the Palestinian community, but also the intricate relationship between indigenous Bedouin tribes and the Mandate government. These two forces were not necessarily, as one would expect, strictly opposing forces, but rather in some ways perceived to be, to a certain extent, beneficial to each other. Moreover, this research demonstrates how the doctrine of orientalism is put into practice.

Jaan Islam, UBC – “Can Muslims be ‘Reasonable’ People? An Analysis of the Theories of Deliberative Democracy and Islamic Identity”

Theories of deliberative democracy have modified and extended the trajectory of the classical liberal tradition in attempting to create a system of political inclusion whereby people of all identities and worldviews can peacefully resolve differences through deliberation. Amongst the many theories include the Rawlsian, Habermasian, and Agonistic models of democratic theory, which in various ways balance between an ideal and opposing reality: the ideal being the need to resolve problems through deliberation, and the reality being the fact that historical exclusion based on difference makes resolution a very difficult process. In formulating their ideals, theorists have focused on reconciling members of identities which are either assumed to be given by nature, or as being reflexive (i.e., possible to change or negotiate). In this paper, I argue that the absorption of Muslims into one of these two categories has hindered the capability of democratic theorists to understand how different Muslims fit into their deliberative models. Specifically, it looks to examine how Muslims who are both religiously conscious and who associate Islam to their social and political beliefs – whose identities cannot be described as natural or reflexive – can be understood through the lens of democratic theory. It is argued this is
possible only through a fundamental revision of the categories and limitations of democratic theory itself.

Rehan Sayeed, UVic – “On the Representational Capacity of Money in Islamic Finance: To Be Gold or Not To Be”

Money, in a conventional economy, is mostly created through bank loans vis-à-vis interest-bearing debt. However, Islamic financial structure prohibits the payment of interest. This creates a challenge for the Islamic financial system: If money cannot be created through debt, how would an economy function? Islamic economists have responded by offering equity-based finance as an alternative to debt-finance model. Equity-finance model offers previously unexplored insights into the representational capacity of money in Islam as several Islamic economists have argued for reverting to metallic coinage- minting of the gold dinar (or dirham). The argument, for most of its proponent, is based on gold’s ostensible status as an inflation-proof asset and its reference to the dictates of the prophetic sayings. However, there are scholars who see this move as economically inefficient and few have even highlighted its potentiality to engage in deceptive uncertainty (gharar)- a major sin in Islam. This representation of gold having “pure” intrinsic value rather than symbolic value leads to the central question of my research: How have contemporary Islamic economists handled the relationship between the materiality (signifier) and the abstract symbolic nature (signified) of money? What monetary role does gold have in contemporary Islamic finance?

Panel 4
“International Relations and Geopolitics”
Chair: Dr. Hasan Siddiqui, UBC

Scott Bursey – “Arming the Nation of Islam: Gaddafi, Farrakhan, Reagan and Perception Management in the Twilight of Third-Worldism”

During the Nation of Islam Saviors’ Day celebratory conference, held on May 4th 1985, in Chicago; Muammar al Gadhafi addressed a crowd of 4,000 conference goers, via closed satellite feed and proceeded to provide an in-depth explanation as to how he would support paramilitary efforts within the United States.1 Gadhafi told the Brothers in attendance that Libya was now their ally in their struggle against ‘white America’, and he also promised to supply weapons to create a 400,000-man strong, black army in America. The expressed goal of this army would be to garner true emancipation for African Americans and, quoting Gadhafi: “if white Americans refuse to accept Blacks as US citizens, [white America] must, therefore, be destroyed”.2 The army for which Gadhafi eluded was never created, and the associated support in the context of arms never materialized, however, this speech underlines the feigning value of third-worldist leaders and their revolutionary diction. This paper will reconcile how this event fits into the revolutionary values Gadhafi espoused in his 1975 political monograph the Green Book. Furthermore, this paper will also touch on how this event fits into Gadhafi’s self-defined ‘Third internal theory’ via his international interventions in global geopolitics.

Hannah West, UVic – “A century of involvement: the historical relationship between the US and the Syrian Kurds”
The ongoing conflict in Syria morphed into a proxy war soon after its inception in 2011. The United States (US) became directly involved in the conflict in 2013 when the Central Intelligence Agency began covertly training Syrian Kurdish rebel troops to fight against the Syrian government’s forces. Many scholars have considered aspects of the Syrian Civil War within their writing; however, there has been little academic treatment of the Syrian Kurd’s position within the Syrian Civil War in a manner that first contextualizes the Kurd’s position within the overall context of their historical relationship with the US. The thesis will attempt to address this void by answering two questions: What geostrategic considerations have shaped US foreign policy toward the Syrian Kurds since the end of the First World War? Further, did the US diverge from its realpolitik policy trend, which favoured practical decisions rather than idealistic ones when declaring their support for the Syrian Kurds in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or have all recent US policy decisions towards the Kurds been decided through an entirely pragmatic calculus rather than an idealistic lens?

Yara Younis, SFU – “The Geopolitical Transfiguration of the Arabian Gulf”

Scholars have been quick to label the Arabian Gulf states (Al Khaleej) as being oil-rich and regressive dictatorships. This set consists of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain. However, these narratives strip away the distinct identity of each state, which consequently undermines the silent and significant evolution of state interests in relation to the changing political and social climate in the Middle East. This research presents a comparative study on the evolutionary social processes continuously constructing identity and interests within and between the Arabian Gulf States from 2004 to 2017. Allowing for a historical and social understanding of the region we see today; the research also addresses the structural conditions that keep Gulf states stable in systems of violence. The complex power relationships between neighbouring states, mainly Iran and Israel, and the changing attitudes of the Arab Muslim population in the region will be explored. Drawing from academic literature in International Relations and Sociology, as well as from media content and local experts in the region, this research aims to contribute an alternative perspective to a Western-dominated narrative.

Panel 5
“Media, Storytelling, and Resistance”
Chair: Dr. Naghmeh Babaee, SFU

Ian Campbell, University of Oregon – “The Role of Social Media in the Recognition of Jerusalem: A Palestinian Narrative of Resistance”

On December 6, 2017, President Donald J. Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The recognition inspired mixed responses on social media from ethnic Muslim Palestinians that manifested physically in spaces such as the Gaza Strip through ongoing weekly demonstrations, and online in the digital domain. The incorporation of social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) analysis reflects its distinctive use as a modern-day tool for communication in the promotion of individual and group narratives across Muslim communities in the Middle East North African (MENA) region. Cases such as the 2009 Iranian Green Movement, the 2010 Arab Uprising, and the 2018 Great March of Return are all examples of the efficacy of social media to
send and receive messages across the global community. This research addresses the identification of online media data (i.e., Posts, Tweets, Videos) based on a year (2017-2018) of fieldwork conducted in MENA. It illustrates aspects of the ethnic Muslim Palestinian narrative related to the recognition of Jerusalem as a means to further promote conflict resolution interventions, mitigate intergroup conflict, increase communication best practices, and expand perspectives through a qualitative analysis of pictorial, video, and textual messaging.

**Shayna Nowicki and Jules Matragrano, Western Washington University** – “Build and Break Down of Tension in Palestinian Cinema”

Our video essay focuses on the ways in which Palestinian directors demonstrate feelings of confinement and stagnation due to the Israeli occupation. These concepts are conveyed through a variety of cinematic techniques and display shared experiences of trauma. Tension build up and release are aspects important to any film, but these directors build tension in a uniquely physical way to highlight confinement and lack of autonomy. We wanted to emphasize the cinematic techniques used to present the abusive way Arab people are treated and compare these scenes from film to film. We chose movies by Palestinian directors in order to highlight the real experience of Arab people. These artists create multi-dimensional and realistically human characters through which they present specific individual experiences instead of making blanket stereotyped statements. They aren’t boiled down to typecasts to be pitied or feared which often occurs in Israeli films depicting Arab life. A lot of the tension within these films comes from what it means to identify as a Palestinian and the unique experiences of people living under the occupation. Most of the narratives release the buildup of tension with triumphant acts of freeness. We structured our essay similarly by ending with a series of scenes of rebellion by Palestinian characters.

**Mona Hedayati, UVic** – “Political Wall Writing as Activism”

I will discuss my new video-recorded performance, Intervention (2018), which explores the role of political wall writing as a form of mass mobilization in in Egypt, Iran and Palestine, manifested according to socio-political distinct tensions of each nation. Political dissent, when formal channels of democratic protest are non-existent, often sees anti-authoritative messages being taken to the walls over the past several decades. Hastily written by the protesters and carelessly erased by the state agents, political wall writing has more than sixty ears of archaeological presence in Iran. In this short video documentation, the case of Iran will be the focus as I physically layer up these dialogues into the wall, repeatedly occupying the role of the protester by writing these statements in Farsi, then the state agent by carelessly painting over them, allowing the layers underneath to show through. This form of activism problematizes the citizen-state dynamics by foregrounding the role of the activist as disruptor of the power relations: challenging the authority by claiming the wall as a tool of mass communication, before the figure of authority reclaims the power by the act of censorship i.e. painting over the writings.
Panel 6
“Cultures in Flux Between the Local and the Global”
Chair: Dr. Ken Seigneurie, SFU

Elly Habibullah, SFU – “Iranian cultural production in Vancouver”

This paper is an attempt to examine the role of artefacts in formation of national identity particularly in the context of diaspora. Thus, this investigation tries to explore what does it mean to leave your homeland and to what extent photography can maintain the long distance relation of nationalists. For Iranians in the 21st century, the definition of modern national identity, is closely tied to a process of ‘place-making’ that foregrounds the ‘primordial origin’ of Iranian peoples. This article draws from the history of discovery and archaeological exploration at the ruins of Persepolis between 1850-1930. The early documentations and photography of the site that are mostly based on the European and American excavation reports demonstrate connection between Western approach to photography and how they enhance construction of “Orient”.

Fatimah Younes, SFU – “The Preservation of Palestinian Identity while Living in Diaspora”

Since the Nakba (the Catastrophe) and the Six-Day War, Palestinians were subjected to expulsion from their homes, some more than once. This mass expulsion shaped generations of Palestinians preserve their identity while living away from Palestine. Through the lens of projects led by Palestinians living outside of Palestine, Edward Said’s memoir Out of Place and the establishment of the Palestine Museum U.S in Woodbridge, Connecticut, the aim of this paper is to explore the different means that Palestinians living in the diaspora use to preserve their memory and identity, and what does being Palestinian mean to them.

Soheyla Tabai, SFU – “From school dropouts to ending up in early marriages, story of young Iranian girls”

Almost four decades after the Islamization process, a high percentage of children in Iran leave school before receiving their high-school diploma due to financial difficulties. In fact, in many peripheral provinces of Iran, a large number of girls drop out of high schools for a variety of reasons such as early marriage, shortage of female teachers, and significant geographical distances between their villages and schools. Early marriage is a significant issue not only in rural and tribal areas, but also in communities in some urban regions. Scholars and activists argue that the real numbers of early marriage in Iran are substantially higher than the numbers in the official census. The negative consequences of child marriage are often far greater than just the impact on the physical and psychosocial health of young girls. Early marriage in many regions of the world has adopted a modern appearance while preserving its traditional configuration so girls can attend school and get married early without being essentially empowered.

In this research, I focus on the relationship between high rate of school dropouts and the sudden increase in the scale of early marriage. I will examine these recent patterns through a framework that centers gender, ethnicity, religion, family traditions, social and cultural elements, and patriarchal associations, as well as educational factors, and economic conditions.