



Centre for Gulf Studies

31st EXETER GULF CONFERENCE

Zones of Theory in the Study of Yemen

1-2 July 2019

Call for Papers

As we enter the fourth decade of the Exeter Gulf Conferences, we return for the third time to Yemen, this time to reflect on the state of the academic field. In recent decades, scholarly work on Yemen has focused so intensely on particular traits and characteristics of the country that these have become all-encompassing analytics, or what Lila Abu-Lughod (1989) terms “zones of theory”. Once a metonym for tribalism, Yemen is now a metonym for insecurity and a privileged zone of theorising for security, policy and strategy studies. Considering the tragedy of the current war and humanitarian crisis, it would appear unproblematic, even commendable, to think of Yemen as a site of absent security. Yet, at the same time, this framing of the country is not particular to the current crisis. Over the last two decades, specialists in the field have written about how Yemen has teetered on the “brink of chaos”. For many, the current situation is validation of this prophecy.

This conference invites participants to reflect on what is overlooked by thinking of Yemen solely in terms of insecurity and to consider such questions as:

- How can we re-engage the scholarly diversity of Yemen studies in times of war and revolution? What should this re-engagement look like?
- Should scholarly work on Yemen have a commitment to “the good”? What is the line between academic research and development - humanitarian, political or otherwise? What does it mean to be ‘critical’?
- How does the current situation relate to larger ethical debates concerning, for instance, the Anthropocene and dwindling resources or the global refugee or financial crisis?
- Is it possible, considering fieldwork constraints imposed by the conflict, to revive ethnographic exploration into the diversity of values, experiences and life-worlds?
- To what extent has scholarly work on Yemen privileged, wittingly or unwittingly, certain actors, political groups or subject matter over others?

- What is the relationship between (in)security discourses and projects of securitisation? To what extent is this field of study gender biased?
- What do we miss by focussing so much of our analytical labour on the manoeuvrings and machinations of a political elite? How is 'the political' defined and demarcated in writings both about the war in Yemen?
- How should we think about political authority, governance and the state? Instead of thinking solely about how people in Yemen *ought* to be governed, is there space to think about what James Scott calls the "art of *not* being governed"?
- How does the eclipse of the state affect expressions of resistance, resilience, and the cultivation of new solidarities? How does this impact gender roles and identities?
- How have collective representations and national imaginaries been shaped and reshaped through heritage industries and the significant loss of material culture?

We welcome contributions from the following disciplines:

- Political economy
- Gender studies
- Anthropology and sociology
- Political science and international relations
- Resource management and development studies
- Heritage/ material culture/ archaeology
- Literature/ poetry/ music
- Migration and diaspora studies
- History (20th and 21st centuries)

A selection of the papers presented will be published in an edited volume by a leading academic press.

How to apply

Interested parties are asked to submit paper proposals (abstracts of 300-500 words), as well as a full CV including affiliation and contact details, by 31st March 2019 to gulfconference@exeter.ac.uk. Candidates whose abstracts are accepted will be notified by 1st May.

Practical Information

All presenters whose papers are accepted for the conference will have their accommodation arranged and paid for by the organizers, 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.