



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 14

Gulf-Africa Relations: Past and Present Trends (Sponsored by Georgetown University SFS-Q)

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Abstract

This workshop focuses on the historic, economic and sociopolitical ties that bind GCC with Africa. Although historical developments constitute an important component of understanding the two regions, this research workshop encompasses current issues such as African migrants in the GCC states, GCC investment in Africa in multiple projects including agricultural land, migrant labor, the influences of remittances to home communities, Qatari influence in dispute resolution in Darfur, Zanzibari identity in the Sultanate of Oman, and hereditary illnesses related to ethnic identity.

Workshop description and rationale

The rapidly changing character of the GCC states and their relations with Africa has captured the interest of scholars hailing from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds such as anthropology, history, sociology and comparative politics. Topics pertaining to

cultural, political and economic institutions have come to figure centrally in representations of the region and its location within national, international and transnational contexts. The important effects of globalization and technology and the marked proliferation of mass media and communication have created opportunities for analyzing the powerful patterns and processes that shaped the interactions of African societies with their Gulf counterparts to some extent in recent times. However, past relations of the Gulf and Africa are also worthy of note in historicizing this link.

Alan Villiers' *Sons of Sindbad: An Account of Sailing with the Arabs in their Dhows, in the Red Sea, round the Coasts of Arabia, and Zanzibar and Tanganyika* (1940) brought wide public awareness regarding encounters between the Kuwaitis who sailed to the coast of Eastern Africa and interacted with the populations of Mombasa, Lamu, Kwale Islands of Zanzibar and the Rufji Delta from where sailors acquired massive amounts of mangrove, used back then for building, from Swahili farmers. Villiers described the daily lives of Gulf sailors with African populations in these islands in interactions that spanned months and even years. In contextualization of the past of Gulf-Africa relations, a lot can be gleaned from Michael Peel's "Africa and the Gulf," (published in 2013, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 55:4, 143-154) in which he argues:

The Gulf's socio-economic relations with sub-Saharan Africa date back millennia. According to one theory, the first migration of people out of Africa 60,000 years ago was across the Bab al-Mandab strait that separates Djibouti and Eritrea from Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula. Artefacts from the ancient kingdom of Mesopotamia show a trading relationship thousands of years old. Centuries ago, the Sultanate of Muscat, in modern-day-Oman, ruled Zanzibar and adjacent sections of the East African Coast. There are cultural affinities between the Gulf and sub-Sahara Africa through Islam - there are more than 50 million Muslims in Nigeria alone - and languages such as Swahili in East Africa, which includes many words derived from Arabic (2013).

These sociocultural dynamics both in the past and present will be dealt with in depth in this workshop.

Scholarly Contribution

We seek to highlight the past to elucidate the sociopolitical dynamics of the Muscat-Zanzibar nexus, the influx of African pilgrims to Mecca for the Haj, the predominant pearling economy in pre-oil Gulf and the pronounced participation of Africans in a powerful maritime political economy that thrived till the discovery of Japanese cultured pearls, manumission testimonies from African slaves fleeing to Bahrain far from slavery. These contributions along with papers addressing present forms of migration to GCC and those exploring Africanity in GCC folklore and ethnomusicology will fill glaring gaps in the literature, which so far focuses exclusively on South Asian labor migrants. Together, the panel will contribute original papers on topics, heretofore, unaddressed. We expect the papers in this volume to be of publishable quality to add to GCC-African relations, past and present, in the most powerful way.

Anticipated Papers

The workshop calls for papers that address a wide variety of topics relating to Gulf-Africa relations from interdisciplinary backgrounds. Papers addressing African migrants and diasporas in the Gulf, anthropology of Gulf society, historiography, folklore, ethnomusicology, diplomacy, cross-cultural interactions, medical anthropology, and heritage will receive higher priority in the selection process. Since the intellectual purpose of this workshop is to highlight the relations between Gulf countries and Africa, current topics pertaining to this link are exceptionally relevant. Participants hailing from all fields of social sciences and humanities, who have conducted original research in the areas identified, are encouraged to apply.

The workshop also seeks ethnographic narratives on the Arabian Gulf region and Africa. This will be of interest to theorists of culture and politics in general and Gulf scholars in particular and will provide the framework within which we situate the relationship between African and Gulf societies.

Workshop Director Profiles

Dale F. Eickelman is Ralph and Richard Lazarus Professor of Anthropology and Human Relations at Dartmouth College and chair of the Department of Anthropology. His publications include “Public Islam and the Common Good,” co-edited with Armando Salvatore (Brill, 2004); “Muslim Politics,” co-authored with James Piscatori (Princeton University Press, new edition, 2004); “The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach” (Prentice Hall, 4th edition, 2002); “New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere” (Indiana University Press, 2nd. Edition, 2003); “Moroccan Islam” (University of Texas Press, 1976); and “Knowledge and Power in Morocco” (Princeton University Press, 1985). A former President of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Prof. Eickelman currently serves as senior advisor to Kuwait’s first private liberal arts university, the American University of Kuwait. In 2009, he was named a Carnegie Scholar for a project entitled “Mainstreaming Islam: Taking Charge of the Faith,” and in 2011 he received the Distinguished Scholar Award from the Middle East Section of the American Anthropological Association. Since January 2013 he has also been President of the Tangier-American Legation Museum Institute.

Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the Edmund Walsh School for Foreign Service, Georgetown University-Qatar and a Senior Fellow at Dartmouth College Anthropology Department and the Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding also at Dartmouth, USA. She is the author of “Wanderings: Sudanese Migrants and Exiles in North America” (Cornell U. P. 2002), “Female

Circumcision: Multicultural Perspectives” (University of Pennsylvania Press 2006), “Transforming Displaced Women in Sudan” (University of Chicago Press 2009) and editor of “What is Left of the Left” (Duke University Press 2011), and “Gender Justice: the Predicament and the Promise” (2011 Brill Journals). In addition to multiple chapters in referred university publications and articles and reviews, she is currently working on a book manuscript tentatively titled “Darfur Allegory,” which engages discussions on Darfur mediation in Qatar. She also authored a paper on “Qatar Mobility and Migration” (forthcoming) and is involved in ethnographic research on Qatari myths, folklore, and ethnomusicology. She teaches courses on Gulf societies: Ethnography, Historiography and Politics and African Studies.

Selected Readings

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Chibwe, E.C. *Arab Dollars for Africa* (New York: Helm, 1976).

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Lienhardt, Peter. “Family Waqf in Zanzibar.” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 27, no. 2 (Trinity, 1989): 95-106.

Peel, M. “Africa and the Gulf.” *Survival* 55, no. 4 (2013): 143-154.

Popovic, A. *Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq* (NJ: Princeton University Press 1999).

Potts, Dan. *Araby the Blest: Studies in Arabian Archaeology* (Museum Tusculum Press).

Villiers, A. “Sons of Sindbad: An Account of Sailing with the Arabs in their Dhows in the Red Sea, round the Coasts of Arabia, and Zanzibar and Tanganyika” (Arabian Publishers, 1940).

Zdanowski, J. *Slavery and Manumission: British Policy in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf in the First Half of the 20th Century* (London: Ithaca Press, 2013).

Zeleza, P.T. *In Search of African Diasporas* (NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2012).
[Chapters on Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia are of special relevance].