

Research Symposium

Crossing the Borders of the Arabian Peninsula

November 6 & 7, 2025
9:30 pm - 5:30 pm

SUAD Campus,
Richelieu Amphitheatre





Summary

The Arabian Peninsula has been profoundly shaped by its strategic position, colonial encounters, and the discovery of oil. During the twentieth century, it underwent two major territorial reconfigurations: first, the creation of modern states and borders between the 1930s and 1960s, which redefined affiliations beyond kinship and tribal ties; and second, the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981, which consolidated a regional space marked by intense immigration flows. These transformations have fostered new dynamics of identity and belonging, as citizens and expatriates negotiate cultural hybridity, shifting territorial imaginaries, and the interplay between national and regional frameworks. In parallel, renewed engagement with pre-Islamic and pre-state pasts, through archaeology and cultural production, reflects a desire to anchor present identities in deeper historical narratives.

This interdisciplinary event, co-organised by the CEFREPA, Sorbonne Nouvelle and Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, brings together scholars from history, literature, anthropology and linguistics to discuss how geographic, sociocultural and symbolic borders are imagined, negotiated, and crosses, and how they shape the Peninsula as a dynamic site of interaction and identity formation.

Programme - Day 1 - November 6

09:30-09:45

Welcome & Opening Remarks

09:45 – 11:30

Panel 1: Making & Contesting Borders: Early-Modern to Modern Histories

Moderator: Dr. Clarisse Roche, UAE University

Dr. Dejanirah Couto - Beyond Borders: Portuguese Routes of the Hajj and the Dissemination of a New Image of the Arabian Peninsula in the Early Modern Period (16th Century).

Dr. Yann Rodier - At the Maritime Frontiers of Arabia: European Rivalries, Franco-Persian Diplomacy, and the Ambition to Conquer Muscat (1690–1718)

Dr. Toth Ferenc - Visible and Invisible Frontiers in Arabia through the Eyes of an Enlightenment Travel Writer: François de Tott's Memoirs (1733–1793)

Dr. Philippe Pétriat - The Caravans Pass...

11:30-11:45 Coffee Break

09:45 – 11:30

Panel 2: Culture, Legitimacy & Regional Reconfigurations

Moderator: Dr. Clio Chaveneau, SUAD/CEFREPA

Dr. Marion Breteau (online) - Can One Talk of a Digital Divide in the Gulf? Reflections on Local and International Stakes.

Dr. Sadia Agsous-Bienstein - Culture and Geopolitics in the Gulf: Redefining and Negotiating Symbolic Boundaries

Dr. Rose-Marie Ferré - Shifting lines, Crossing Lines: How Biennials Redefine the Borders of the Art World.

1-2pm : Lunch Break

2:00-3:15

Panel 3: Borders Representations and Circulations across the Peninsula

Moderator: Dr. Laure Assaf, NYUAD/CEFREPA

Dr. Cristina Greco - Visual Frontiers: Cultural Myth, Identity, and the Semiotics of Border in the Gulf Semiosphere

Dr. Thomas Richard - Spatiality and the Imaginary of the Filmed Frontier in the Arabian Peninsula

Dr. Florian Bonnefoi - Migration and Trade Routes Between Egypt and Kuwait: Human and Non-Human Circulations in the Context of the Fish Trade

Short Break

3:45-5pm

Panel 4: Women, Youth and the Everyday Negotiation of Social Frontiers

Moderator: Dr. Clio Chaveneau, SUAD/CEFREPA

Dr. Alice Königstetter - Reimagining Kuwait: Gender, Borders, and the Nation in Munā Al-Šammārī's Lā Mūsīqā fī al-Aḥmadī (2016).

Dr. Laure Assaf - The Making of Status: Rethinking Socio-Ethnic Boundaries in the Gulf

Dr. Corina Lozovan - Living Time: Everyday Temporal Borders in Oman.

Day 2 - November 7

Translation from and to English/Arabic/French will be provided all day

09:00–10:45

Panel 5: Questioning Social and Symbolic Borders (1): Race and Ethnicity

Moderator: Dr. Hana Subhi, SUAD

Dr. Solenn Almajali - Des frontières ethnico-raciales ? Les mûwalladîn et mûwalladât d'origine africaine au Yémen et en diaspora. ("Ethno-racial Boundaries? The Muwalladîn and Muwalladât of African Descent in Yemen and the Diaspora.")

Dr. Salwa Almainan - Les affranchis dans la littérature du Golfe : des personnages marginaux en quête de liberté. ("The Freed in Gulf Literature: Marginal Figures in Search of Freedom")

Dr. Zâineb Ben Lagha - L'affranchi, l'homme libre et la mulâtresse : une lecture de Hasard de la nuit de 'Abduh Khâl. ("The Freedman, the Free Man, and the Mulatta: A Reading of *Night's Fortune* by 'Abdu Khâl.")

Dr. Muna Sahli & Dr. Daad Alnaser – تشكيل الهوية بين الأنا والآخر في رواية "قيامة الآخرين" لإيمان اليوسف: قراءة في التفاعل الثقافي داخل وخارج شبه الجزيرة العربية ("The Construction of Identity between the Self and the Other in *The Resurrection of Others* by Iman Al-Youssef")

10:45–11:00 - Coffee break

11:00 – 12:15

Panel 6: Questioning Social and Symbolic Borders (2): Identities and Belongings

Moderator: Dr. Karine Germoni, Sorbonne université, SUAD

Dr. Nawal Alhalah - "البحريات" رواية: شبه الجزيرة العربية: النساء العابرات للحدود في شبه الجزيرة العربية: رواية "البحريات" (Border-Crossing Women in the Arabian Peninsula: Umayma al-Khamîs's *The Sea Travelers*)

Dr. Martina Censi - Crossing Boundaries in the novel *Nārinja* (Bitter Orange Tree, 2016) by Jokha al-Harhi.

Pr. Elisabeth Vauthier - Frontières spatiales et frontières mentales : tensions identitaires koweïtiennes dans *Les souris de Umm Hessa* de Saoud Al-Sanoussi. ("Spatial and Mental Frontiers: Kuwaiti Identity Tensions in Saud Al-Sanousi's *The Mice of Umm Hessa*")

12:15-13:15 : Lunch Break

1:15-2:30

Panel 7: Linguistic Borderlands

Moderator: Dr. Zaïneb Ben Lagha Université Sorbonne Nouvelle/CEFREPA/SUAD

Pr. Frédéric Lagrange - Ethical and Practical Underpinnings of Code-Switching for Arab Singers in their relation to the Gulf Region.

Dr. Ali Manoubi - Quelle place pour le hobyot au sein des langues sudarabiques modernes ? ("Positioning Hobyot among the Modern South Arabian Languages")

Dr. Hana Subhi - Les frontières linguistiques dans Ushba wa Matar (Herbe et Pluie) de Widad Khalifa. ("Crossing Linguistic Frontiers in Widad Khalifa's Ushba wa Matar (Grass and Rain)")

Short Break

2:45-4pm

Panel 8: Crossing Spatial Borders of Humans and Ideas

Moderator: Frédéric Lagrange, Sorbonne Université / CEDEJ

Dr. Ibrahim Akel - شبه الجزيرة العربية في مرايا الحكايا: قراءة في حضور الجزيرة داخل ألف ليلة وليلة وامتداد النص الألفليبي في ثقافتها ("the Arabian Peninsula in the Mirrors of Narrative: The Thousand and One Nights and Peninsular Culture")

Dr. Emanuela Buscemi - The Literary Urban: Borders of Territory and Affect in Contemporary Gulf Literature.

Biographies of the Presenters and Organizers

Sadia Agsous-Bienstein is an Associate Professor at Sorbonne Nouvelle University, specializing in cultural studies of the MENA region, with research grounded in Arabic-Palestinian and Hebrew-Israeli languages, literatures, and cultures. Her work also engages with translation studies and modern Arab thought, particularly in relation to Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine and Palestinian cultural archives prior to 1948. Her latest book, *Derrière l'hébreu, l'arabe. Le roman palestinien en hébreu* (1966–2017), published by Classiques Garnier in 2022, examines the literary production of Palestinians in Israel (Palestinians of '48). Deeply engaged with the intellectual history of the Arab world - particularly in the context of Jewish-Arab relations - her forthcoming book focuses on Arab intellectuals and writers and their approaches to European antisemitism and the Holocaust.

Ibrahim Akel is Associate Professor at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. He graduated in 2000 with a Bachelor's degree in Arabic Language and Literature from the University of Damascus and later obtained several postgraduate diplomas in diverse fields, including Literary Studies, Theatre Studies, and Educational Planning. He subsequently moved to Paris to pursue advanced academic studies, earning both his Master's and Ph.D. degrees from the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO) in 2016. He has published extensively on Arabic manuscripts, One Thousand and One Nights, and popular Arabic literature. In 2021, he co-edited a collective volume with William Granara, Director of the Arabic Language Program at Harvard University. His most recent work is a critical edition of Nawādir al-Shirbīnī.

Daad Al Naser is an Associate Professor of Arabic Rhetoric and Criticism at the United Arab Emirates University. She has previously taught at universities in Jordan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include cultural criticism and epistemological archaeology, which uncover the hidden masks of both official and popular literature. She has explored themes such as the literature of folly, parasitism, and madness, publishing dozens of papers and participating in several related conferences. She is also a creative writer, authoring numerous short stories and children's stories in written, audio, and digital forms. As a novelist, she won the Islamic Literary Association Award for her novel *Camp, My Homeland* (Mukhayyam Ya Watan), which deals with the experience of Palestinian exile.

Nawal Alhalah is an Associate Professor at the University of Lille. She is a member of the research laboratory: Center for the Study of Civilizations, Languages, and Foreign Literature. She holds a PhD in Modern Arabic Literature from the University of Damascus. She has published a book: *Innovation in the Contemporary Syrian Novel* (in Arabic).

Salwa Almainan is Graduate of the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (Inalco) in modern and contemporary Arabic literature, and assistant professor at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, in the French language and translation department. She has published various articles in French journals and participated in several national and international conferences. Her research focuses primarily on the evolution of the modern and contemporary Saudi novel and its significance in the literary field. She is also interested in imaginative literature, particularly science fiction and fantasy novels, and more recently in the translation of Saudi works into French and their reception.

Solenn Almajali is an anthropologist and activist for migrants' rights in Jordan. Her research focuses on racialisation, mixed-race identities, belonging, and sociability in the context of forced migration. Her current work particularly explores Yemeni migrations and mixed ethnicities between the Horn of Africa and Yemen.

Laure Assaf is Assistant Professor of Arab Crossroads Studies and Anthropology at New York University Abu Dhabi. Her research interests focus on youth, urbanity, and migration in contemporary Emirati society and the broader Gulf region. She is currently working on a book manuscript on Arab youth in Abu Dhabi.

Zaïneb Ben Lagha is Assistant Professor of Modern Arabic Literature and Deputy Director of the Centre for Oriental Studies (CEAO) at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University in Paris. She is currently Visiting Researcher at the French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA) and Affiliated Researcher at Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi. Her research focuses on Modern Arabic Literature and the writing of history, Figures of the marginal in contemporary Arabic literature and currently on Identities and alterities in contemporary novels from the Arabian Peninsula. She is the co-editor of *Étrangeté de l'autre, singularité du moi. Les figures du marginal dans les littératures*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2015 and *Imaginaire et espace dans les mondes arabes et hébraïques*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2023.

Florian Bonnefoi is a geographer and postdoctoral researcher at CEDEJ Khartoum, now relocated to Cairo, affiliated with the Institut Convergences Migrations. His thesis work (2020-2024) conducted at the University of Poitiers (Migrinter), Paris 8 (LAVUE), and CEDEJ focused on the links between environmental and climate degradation and migration in Egypt's Nile Delta region. Based on 2.5 years of fieldwork, he has worked with communities of fishermen, small farmers, and street vendors in the Nile Delta countryside. He has particularly focused on the concepts of multivulnerability and adaptation, paying special attention to perceptions of the environment and interactions between humans and non-humans. More generally, he is interested in Egyptian migration, particularly labor migration and masculinities. The trajectories of his research interlocutors led him to conduct a short fieldwork in Kuwait in 2024.

Marion Breteau is an anthropologist and research associate at the Centre Français de la Recherche de la Péninsule Arabique (CEFREPA Kuwait). She joined the TikTok Cultures Research Network (Curtin University, Australia) as an international research member in 2022 and the French research group Internet, AI et Société in 2024. Her doctorate (Aix-Marseille University, France), earned in 2019, investigates love and marriage among youth in Oman. Her current research focuses on journo-influencing in Kuwait and the digital literacy of migrant workers in the Gulf.

Emanuela Buscemi is an interdisciplinary scholar in the social sciences based at Zayed University, Abu Dhabi (UAE). Her research focuses on social movements and resistance, gender politics, urban studies, memory, and belonging in the Arabian Gulf and Latin America. Her co-edited volume *Gulf Women's Lives: Voice, Space, Place* was published by the University of Exeter Press in 2024. She is also the co-editor of the volume *Everyday Youth Cultures in the Gulf Peninsula: Changes and Challenges* (2021). Her work has been featured in the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, *Contemporary Social Science*, *Democratization*, as well as in edited volumes published by New York University Press, Routledge, Peter Lang and Palgrave MacMillan.

Martina Censi has been an Assistant Professor at the University of Bergamo (Italy) since 2018. She is an Associate Researcher in the Arabic Studies Unit of the Interlanguage Research Group: Memories, Identities, Territories (ERIMIT) at Rennes 2 University. She holds a joint Italian-French PhD (Ca' Foscari University of Venice and INALCO, Paris). Her research, situated in the field of contemporary Arabic literature, and particularly the Arabic novel, focuses on representations of the body and the processes of identity construction among individuals and communities in contemporary Arab societies. She adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary theory with feminist criticism, gender studies, postcolonial studies, and sociology. Among her publications are (2022). *Negotiating Boundaries in Arabic Literature*, *Quaderni di studi arabi* 17, Leiden: Brill. ; M. Censi and M. E. Paniconi (eds) (2023). *The Migrant in Arab Literature: Displacement, Self-Discovery and Nostalgia*, London: Routledge.

Clio Chaveneau is Associate Professor of sociology at the Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (SUAD) since 2016 and she holds a PhD in Sociology from Paris Descartes-Sorbonne (2016). She is affiliate researcher at the CEFREPA. She is currently the Head of SAFIR, the Research institute of Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi. Her research focuses on privileged migration and contemporary social dynamics in the Middle East (Palestinian Territories and the United Arab Emirates) and she conducts qualitative research on the urban public spaces of Abu Dhabi, Arab digital pop culture, and mixed marriages and transnational families in the Palestinian Territories and the United Arab Emirates.

Dejanirah Couto is Professor of early modern portuguese overseas history, global and connected history at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), Paris (ret.). She was associated researcher of the Institut Français d'études Anatoliennes, Istanbul (IFEA) (2010-2015). Her research focuses on entangled Portuguese-Ottoman-Arab-Indian political, economic and cultural relations from the Mediterranean to Southeast Asia with a focus on the Indian Ocean. She has published widely (more than 100 articles and books) on global and connected history, diplomacy, cartography, maritime warfare, military architecture, port-cities and merchant networks in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, South and Southeast Asia. She is currently an associated researcher of the Mondo500 project (EHESS/ École Française de Rome). She was appointed "officier des palmes académiques" by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research of France (2015).

Rose-Marie Ferré is Associate Professor in Art History of the Middle Ages at Sorbonne University since 2009, and Head of the Master's degree in Expertise and Art Market since 2019. Today, she is the Head of the Department of Archaeology and Art History of SUAD. Her research focuses on the factors of artistic commissions and in particular the actions and role of the great Princes and Kings of the late Middle Ages, but also on the questions of iconography and cultural transmission. Currently, she focuses on contemporary issues, in connection with expertise and art market. Her research deals with the modern and contemporary art in the Arab countries, particularly collections and collectors in the United Arab Emirates. She regularly collaborates with artists and actors from the art world, for curatorial projects.

Cristina Greco is an Assistant Professor at the College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Zayed University. She earned a PhD in Communication Sciences with a thesis in Semiotics at Sapienza University of Rome (Italy). She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Filosofie Semiotiche Journal* and an Editor for the book series "Trajectories of Gender, Cultures and Social Change in the Middle East", published by the University of Exeter Press. She co-founded the Gulf Association of Semiotic Studies (UAE). Her research interests include semiotics of culture, media and communication studies, food and cultural heritage, emerging media, and urban life, with a focus on the theories of collective memory and cultural identity. Her latest publication is Greco, C., Leone, M. (2025). *Wearing the Veil in the Web: Transformations of Social Norms and Everyday Practices in the Digital Sphere*, *International Journal for Semiotics of Law*;

Alice Königstetter is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Near Eastern Studies, University of Vienna, Austria. Her dissertation, *Voices and Silences in Contemporary Women's Fiction from Kuwait*, explores representations at the intersection of language, nationality, and gender. She is currently a Visiting Fellow at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium, at the Department of Linguistics and Literary Studies. In addition, she is an affiliated PhD Researcher at the Centre Français de Recherche de la Péninsule Arabique (CEFREPA), Kuwait. Alice's research interests include postcolonial literature, cultural production in the Arab Gulf region, and gender studies.

Frédéric Lagrange is Professor of Arabic Studies at Sorbonne Université and currently Director of CEDEJ (Cairo). His research has focused on issues of language and gender in Arab cultural productions from the medieval period to the present. He co-issued *Culture Pop en Egypte, Entre Mainstream commercial et contestation* (Riveneuve, 2020) and *Pop Culture in the Arabian Peninsula, Societal Expressions, Commercial Issues and State Cooptions* (Arabian Humanities online, 2023). He has also worked on the history of music and singers in Egypt in the 20th century. He is a translator of classical and contemporary Arabic literature.

Corina Lozovan is a PhD candidate and researcher in Political Science and International Relations at the Catholic University of Portugal. She holds a Master's degree in Middle Eastern Studies. Her research focuses on the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East and Europe, using an interdisciplinary, cross-regional approach to examine how local practices shape socio-historical, political, religious and geopolitical dynamics in contemporary contexts.

Ali Manoubi, Ph.D. (2023-Sorbonne Université) is an associate researcher at the Centre d'Études et de Recherche Moyen-Orient, Méditerranée (CERMOM, EA 4091) and at the Centre de Recherches Littératures, Imaginaires, Sociétés (LIS, UR7305). He is the recipient of the thesis prize in Middle Eastern Languages and Literatures (IMOMM, 2024-France). His linguistic research focuses on the Modern South Arabian languages, Arabic, and French as a foreign language.

Philippe Pétriat is Associate professor (maitre de conférences) at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University. He specialises in the history of contemporary Middle Eastern countries, particularly the economic history of the Arabian Peninsula. His latest book, *The Last Caravan* (Cambridge University Press, 2025), focuses on the history of the transformations of the regional common market from the Ottoman Empire to the construction of contemporary states in the region stretching from Turkey to the Gulf countries.

Yann Rodier, Head of the History Department at Sorbonne Université Abu Dhabi, is the author of *La Raison de la haine. Histoire d'une passion dans la France du XVII^e siècle*, published by Éditions Champ Vallon in 2020. This work, based on his doctoral thesis, was awarded the Prix de la Revue d'études du XVII^e. He is affiliated with SAFIR and the Centre Roland Mousnier (Sorbonne Université) within the sub-axis on the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean. His current research focuses on Persians and Arabs from Isfahan to Ayutthaya in the context of Louis XIV's Christian diplomacy in the Indian Ocean.

Muna Sahli is a Libyan academic and poet, she earned a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Manchester, UK, in 2007. She holds the position of Associate Professor of Literature and Literary Criticism in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at United Arab Emirates University. She has participated in numerous international conferences and academic programs, including the "Visiting Professors Program" in the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard University in 2014. She has several published and forthcoming works in the fields of literary and cultural studies and creative writing. She is a member of the Arabic Language Academy in Libya and of several academic and cultural organizations.

Hana Subhi is Assistant Professor in FLE Department at Sorbonne Abu Dhabi since 2006. She obtained her PHD in Modern French Literature from the University of Paris III, Sorbonne-Nouvelle. Her publications focus on immigration and identity. She has translated several books in literature and philosophy from French into Arabic, including the French philosopher Edgar Morin's "The Humanity of Humanity" which received the Senghor Ibn-Khaldun Prize from the International Organization of the Francophonie in 2014. Fields of interest: French literature, Arabic Literature, and translation.

Ferenc Tóth is Research Director at the Institute of History of HUN-REN CRSH. In 1995, he defended a doctoral thesis at the University of Paris-Sorbonne on the history of the social integration of Hungarian immigration in France during the 18th century. In 2003, he obtained his habilitation à diriger des recherches (HDR) from the same university. In 2014, he defended another thesis at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His research fields include: the history of Hungarian soldiers and agents in the service of France, and the influence of the Turkish wars in Europe during the early modern period. He has already published more than 30 books and over 200 studies, notably *A French Military Diplomat in Eastern Europe at the End of the Ancien Régime: François de Tott (1733–1793)*, Istanbul, 2011, among others.

Elisabeth Vaulthier is Professor Emerita of Arabic Literature at Jean Moulin University (Lyon 3), and a member of the Institute for Transtextual and Transcultural Studies (IETT) and the French Center for Research on the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA). She conducts research on modern and contemporary Arabic novels, focusing particularly on the evolution of the novel in the Arabian Peninsula.