Thursday 27th & Friday 28th June 2024

# 34th Exeter Gulf Conference

## Lifeworlds of Energy & Environment in the Gulf

University of Exeter | Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies

# Welcome!

## Who We Are: Institute of Arab & Islamic Studies (IAIS) & The Centre for Gulf Studies (CGS)

### Institute of Arab & Islamic Studies (IAIS)

Nestled within the beautiful grounds of the University of Exeter, the Institute of Arab & Islamic Studies (IAIS) stands as a beacon of academic excellence with its dedicated building donated by the Ruler of Sharjah, Dr Shaikh Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, himself a PhD graduate of Exeter.

Founded in 1999, IAIS is one of the foremost academic institutions in the UK offering research and taught degree programmes in a wide range of areas within the field of Arab, Middle Eastern, and Islamic Studies. At IAIS, we offer teaching in several Middle Eastern languages as well as comprehensive education in the literatures and cultures of the Arab world and Middle East, the history, politics, economies, societies, and anthropology of the region and almost every aspect of Islamic studies from medieval to modern Islam.

To view the full extent of our works, including our future research and workshops, check out our social media channels (Instagram, Twitter/X, LinkedIn & YouTube) to keep up to date with our events!

### The Centre for Gulf Studies (CGS)

Gulf studies at Exeter began in 1978 with the foundation of the Centre for Arab Gulf Studies. In 1999, the Centre was merged with the Department of Arabic & Islamic Studies to form IAIS.

CGS is an inter-disciplinary team of researchers in humanities and social sciences interested in all aspects of anthropology, history, economy, politics and society of the Gulf region. The Centre's collective expertise encompasses the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and Iran. It provides an internationally recognised environment for research, hosting a number of PhD students and externally funded projects. In addition, our staff plays an active role in advising on the Gulf political and economic affairs and the preservation of cultural heritage.

The Centre for Gulf Studies has been hosting the world's longest-running conference series on the Gulf region and Arabian Peninsula since 1979. The Gulf Collection, which is one of the largest in the world, is housed in the Arab World Documentation Unit (AWDU), also located at IAIS.

To keep up to date with events and news from CGS, check out our Twitter/X page (@GulfExeter)!

# 34th Annual Exeter Gulf Conference 2024

## Lifeworlds of Energy & Environment in the Gulf

"The Gulf is at one the site of some of the world's largest hydrocarbon reservoirs and one of the areas of the planet most exposed to environmental crises. The United Arab Emirate's (UAE) presidency of COP28 in 2023, and sustainability as the main theme of the Dubai Expo have brought into start relief the paradox of dependence on fossil fuels in the economic and political life of the region at exactly the moment of intensification of climate change and environmental degradation.

More than 50% of the world's known petroleum reserves and more than 40% of the world's known natural gas reserves are located in the Gulf. At the same time, land erosion, depletion of groundwater, salination of rivers, drought, desiccation of coastal sabkhas and mangroves are redefining lives and livelihoods in the region. Financialisaton of fossil production, increase in the production of plastics and hydrocarbons, and ineffective technologies around carbon capture and trade-off only exacerbate the crisis. At the same time, grassroots mobilisation for just transition and environmental causes are taking hold and growing in the region, despite attempts by governments to suppress them. Awareness of fossil entanglements in life, arts, and business spur on political, social, and artistic movements to highlight the effects of climate change.

The 34th Exeter Gulf Conference takes this urgent moment as the starting point to ask new questions about the life worlds of petroleum and ecological crisis in the region (defined broadly to include the Arabian Peninsula, Iran & Iraq):

- In what ways have fossil fuels shaped everyday life in the Gulf?
- How do we understand forms of artistic production, political mobilisation, and labour protests in petroleum producing countries of the region?
- How do we understand the emergence of new energy technologies in a time of transition?
- What is the politics of infrastructure construction and use in times of climate change?
- How does ecological crisis shape gender, class and racial relations?
- How do we understand the relationship between fossil capital and social phenomena such as migration, class formation and urban development inter alia?
- The colonial/imperial histories of fossil fuels and environmental change."

**Professor Laleh Khalili**
**CGS Director & Al-Qasimi Professor of Gulf Studies**

# Conference Schedule

## 27th June 2024

### 9:00 – 10:00, Conference Registration & Coffee

### 10:00 – 11:45, Panel 1A – Chair: Kanwal Hameed

- **Pascal Menoret**, University of Oxford (UK), "Pipeline Protest and the Political Imagination"
- **Faezeh Ghasemi**, Independent Researcher & Journalist (Iran), "An Examination of Labor Strikes of Iran's Oil Industry in the 2020s"
- **Kaveh Ehsani**, De Paul University (USA), "Oil Capitalism and the Right to the City of Iran"

### 12:00 – 13:00, Lunch Break

### 13:00 – 14:45, Panel 1B – Chair: Marc Valeri

- **Anna Oustry**, Sciences Po (France), "Strategic Labour Market Reforms and Green Energy Transition in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)"
- **Amir Imani**, Independent Researcher (Iran), "Balancing Act: Unravelling the Environmental Consequences of Sanctions on Iran's Energy Industry and the Pursuit of Sustainable Oil Extraction Technologies"
- **Ismail Numan Telci**, Sakarya University (Turkey), "Renewable Energy Transition in the Gulf: Challenges and Prospects in a Fossil-Fuel Dominant Region"

### 14:45 – 15:00, Coffee Break

## 15:00 – 16:45, Panel 1C – Chair: Adam Hanieh

- **Wang Danyu**, Shanghai International Studies University (China), “The Impact of Oil spills on Daily Life in the Gulf: From the Perspective of Marine Environment”
- **Noor AlShaikh**, Bahrain & Alaa AlSheabi, UCL (UK), “Sacrifice Zones on Oil Frontiers: Indigenous Struggles for Environmental Justice in the Bahraini Villages of Sitra and Ma’ameer”

## 17:00– 18:30, Keynote – Chair: Laleh Khalili

- **Gökçe Günel**, Rice University (USA), **A Hydrogen Hub**

## 19:00, Conference dinner

# 28th June 2024

## 10:30 – 12:00, Panel 2A – Chair: Claire Beaugrand

- **Scott Erich**, Virginia (USA), "The Oil Age from the Deck of a Fishing Boat"
- **Natalie Koch**, Syracuse University (USA), "Green nationalism from above: Authoritarian state power and the greening of UAE nationalism"

## 12:00 – 13:00, Lunch Break

## 13:00 – 14:45, Panel 2B – Chair: Sabiha Allouche

- **Marwa Koheji**, New York University Abu Dhabi (UAE), "Air-conditioning and the Sensing of an Oil Modernity in Bahrain"
- **Florence Wolstenholme**, QMUL (UK), "'Just a real estate project?': The role of the built environment in constituting 'offshore' Dubai"
- **Natasha Iskander**, NYU (USA), "Concrete Futures in the Gulf and Beyond"

## 14:45 – 15:00, Coffee Break

## 15:00 – 16:30, Panel 2C – Chair: Allan Hassanian

- **Maia Holtermann-Entwistle & Sharri Plonski**, QMUL (UK), "'If Africa loses, we all lose': Racial genealogies in the UAE's green development projects in Africa"
- **Arbella Bet-Shlimon**, University of Washington (USA), "Producing a Crisis, c. 1961: Iraqi and Kuwaiti Sovereignties, Extraction, and the Environment"

## 16:45 – 18:00, Conference closing (Wine Reception)

# Speaker Details & Abstracts

## Pascal Menoret

pmenoret@brandeis.edu

**Abstract:**

**Pipeline Protest and the Political Imagination**

How do fossil fuels shape everyday politics in the only oil-poor country of the Arabian Peninsula? This paper looks at a pipeline project through the lens of its disruptors: those citizens, oil workers, and petty landowners who were affected by the project and decided to react to it. In Carbon Democracy (Verso Books, 2013), Timothy Mitchell showed that the coal industry enabled mass politics by allowing workers to pressure political elites through strikes and sabotages. The oil industry, by contrast, strengthens authoritarian capitalism: its workers are few and far between, its markets are global, and it operates far away from centers of power. An ethnographic study of pipeline construction unsettles this distinction. Once completed, a pipeline is buried and made invisible. But during the time of construction, a pipeline become highly visible and materialized: there is a right-of-way, roads, a trench, massive tubes, borrow pits, parking lots, welding schools, trucks, busses, and labor camps. A pipeline project is a big, disruptive piece of infrastructure that, in turn, enables protest. In this paper, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted on a pipeline project in the late 2000s, I look at the political imaginations of several actors: 1) local residents, with their expectations of fair labor and wages and their memories of a more just and democratic socialist state not so long ago; 2) security contractors and experts in health, safety, and environment, with their conflicted imaginations of tribal violence and of backward societies to develop; 3) and finally the pipeline itself, whose shadow looms large and which is not only a metaphor of political power, but also a megaphone, a soapbox on which diverse actors climb to formulate demands and make their voices heard.

# Faezah Ghasemi

f.ghasemi461@gmail.com



**Abstract:**

**An Examination of Labor Strikes of Iran's Oil Industry in the 2020s**

In the lead up to the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the protracted labor strikes of oil industry workers significantly contributed to the Shah's downfall. However, in recent decades, the incidence of labor strikes in Iran's oil industry has been notably reduced. This reduction is attributed partly to the Islamic Republic of Iran's policies altering the work contracts of oil industry subcategories, and partly to fluctuations in Iran's oil economy during recent years. Notably, this topic gained prominence during the 2023 protests in Iran. This article aims to investigate the shifts within Iran's oil industry over the past four decades and explore the dynamic between the government and oil workers, analyzing the factors contributing to the disparity in workers' conditions, particularly within the province of Khuzestan, in comparison to other industries.

# Kaveh Ehsani

kehsani@depaul.edu



**Abstract:**

**Oil Capitalism & the Right to the City in Iran**

Intense struggles over the building of the urban infrastructure of oil in southwest Iran during the interwar years shaped the long term social and spatial impact of oil in the Persian Gulf as well as beyond. The design and building of urban infrastructure in the refinery city of Abadan, the cradle of the oil industry in the Gulf and the Middle East, turned this border boomtown into the site of intense and formative encounters between emerging corporate global oil, nascent Irania national state institutions intent on imposing their sovereignty and forging a modern nation state, and a diverse local rural society of tribesmen and destitute migrants and industrial workers caught in the throes of violent transformations.

Based on archival and ethnographic research, this paper explores how lasting struggles over the built environment and urban physical infrastructure of oil in the Abadan reshaped social relations, corporate practices, governmental policies, and sparked innovative repertoires of place-based grassroots politics and claims to contemporary forms of secular citizenship that continue to shape the contentious politics of oil in Iran and the region.

# Anna Oustry

anna.oustry@etu.univ-amu.fr



**Abstract:**

**Strategic Labour market Reforms & Green Energy Transition in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)**

In the context of the United Arab Emirates' energy transition, it is evident that the nation encounters a major domestic obstacle in the form of its labour market, crucial to achieving its set energy goals. The increasing demand for energy transition pressures Emirati labour, necessitating an international 'green skilled' workforce in specific energy sectors. Simultaneously, this demand for more foreign workers encourages the state to improve the kafala system and regularly update visa regulations to aid corporate hiring, while also controlling the foreign labour influx with monitoring and security systems.

The UAE's strategy to bridge this gap involves attracting international talent with expertise in design, construction, electrical engineering, computer literacy, English fluency, and problem-solving skills. This effort is in response to the projection that green jobs will increase from 3,510 in 2018 to approximately 110,000 by 2030, encompassing both high-skilled roles (attracting professionals from Western countries, the Philippines, India, and other Arab nations) and low-skilled positions (relying on temporary workers from South and Southeast Asia for construction and maintenance).

In response to these evolving labour requirements, the UAE has initiated reforms in its migration policies, particularly revising the kafala visa-sponsorship system. Recent measures include an unemployment insurance scheme and Green and Gold Visas, offering extended residencies and reduced sponsor dependency for high-skilled professionals. However, the effectiveness of these measures, particularly for low-skilled workers, remains debated. Simultaneously, the UAE faces the challenge of balancing its need for foreign labour with national security concerns. Traditional approaches, including extensive surveillance and stringent naturalisation policies, are being recalibrated to attract and retain skilled workers while ensuring economic growth and security.

Finally, this article underlines that this emerging phenomenon remains only perceptible on a small scale insofar as the Emirati government does not seek to significantly enhance its competitiveness and profitability.

# Amir Imani

amirimani4@gmail.com



**Abstract:**

**Balancing Act: Unravelling the Environmental Consequences of Sanctions on Iran's Energy Industry and the Pursuit of Sustainable Oil Extraction Techniques**

Iran, a key player in the global energy landscape, has faced formidable challenges arising from international sanctions aimed at curtailing its nuclear ambitions. This article delves into the intricate interplay between sanctions, Iran's energy industry, and the resultant environmental consequences, shedding light on the delicate balance between economic pursuits and ecological sustainability. The imposition of sanctions has not only led to economic ramifications but has profoundly affected Iran's energy sector, hindering its access to cutting-edge technologies essential for sustainable resource extraction. This study seeks to address the environmental repercussions of these challenges, scrutinizing how Iran's constrained access to new energy technologies has affected its ecology. Therefore, the article's first goal is to answer technological constraints and environmental Impact questions. The embargo-induced limitations on Iran's access to new energy technologies have compelled the nation to rely on outdated methods for fossil fuel extraction.

This research aims to analyse the specific environmental costs incurred in pursuing economic development through traditional and less environmentally friendly energy extraction techniques. In addition, the article investigates the political dimensions of Iran's energy infrastructure development in the context of climate change. Examining how political decisions have influenced infrastructure construction and utilization, the study explores how these dynamics have further exacerbated the ecological crisis, presenting insights into the intricate nexus between politics, climate change, and environmental sustainability. In essence, this article endeavours to strike a balance between economic imperatives and ecological sustainability in Iran's energy industry. By addressing these research questions, the study offers comprehensive insights into the multifaceted relationship between sanctions, limited technological access, and the environmental challenges faced by Iran, contributing to both academic discourse and policy considerations for a more sustainable future.

# Ismail Numan Telci

intelci@sakarya.edu.tr



**Abstract:**

**Renewable Energy Transition in the Gulf: Challenges and Prospects in a Fossil-Fuel Dominant Region**

This paper presents an exploration of the challenges confronting Gulf countries as they navigate the transition from a deep-seated dependence on fossil fuels to renewable energy. This transition is not a technological shift but a complex reconfiguration of economic structures, geopolitical dynamics, and environmental strategies. First, this study undertakes a thorough policy analysis to understand the legislative and strategic frameworks guiding this energy transition. This is complemented by an economic assessment that probes into the financial implications of reducing reliance on fossil fuels, which have long been the backbone of the Gulf economies. Further, the study evaluates the current state and potential of renewable energy technologies within the unique environmental and geographical context of the Gulf region. The core of this paper lies in its argument that the Gulf region's journey towards renewable energy is riddled with complexities far beyond the technical realm. It argues that this transition is a geopolitical tightrope walk, balancing the need to maintain global energy influence with a pressing responsibility towards environmental stewardship. Economically, the paper posits that the shift is a double-edged sword: while it promises a future of sustainable growth, it also poses significant threats to the existing economic paradigms and labour markets heavily reliant on the fossil fuel industry. Technologically, the paper does not avoid from highlighting the substantial gaps and challenges in adopting renewable energy sources, given the current infrastructure and investment landscape. It suggests that the path to a renewable future is not linear but fraught with obstacles that require innovative solutions and sustained commitment. This paper contributes to the critical discourse on energy transitions in resource-rich regions. It not only identifies the multifaceted challenges and barriers but also posits potential pathways and strategies for sustainable energy development in the Gulf region.

# Wang Danyu

0214101606@shisu.edu.cn



**Abstract:**

**The Impact of Oil spills on Daily Life in the Gulf: From the Perspective of Marine Environment**

Oil is the economic lifeblood of the Gulf States. The Gulf region is not only home to many offshore oil exploration platforms, but also a necessary stop for most oil tankers. While oil brings great economic benefits to the Gulf region, oil spills are also one of the main problems challenging the Gulf region, causing damage to the marine environment and affecting the daily life of the Gulf region.

There are various causes of oil spills in the Gulf region. First, oil leaks caused by offshore operations, mainly from oil extraction accidents such as offshore oil platform accidents, pipeline leaks. Second, oil leakage at sea due to tanker accidents, such as tanker collision and aging tankers not being disposed of in a timely and effective manner. Thirdly, oil spills are caused by attacks on oil tankers during wars and military activities. Oil spill adversely affects Gulf oceans. Firstly, the destruction of the marine environment in the Gulf, with oil floating along the coastline and on the sea surface. Secondly, it has damaged the marine ecosystem. The oil spill has not only endangered the living environment of coral reefs, mangroves and other organisms, but has also destroyed the habitats of fish, seabirds, turtles and other organisms.

Oil spills affect daily life in the Gulf by damaging the marine environment. First, the subsistence material of the Gulf region is threatened. Freshwater resources are essential to the lives of Gulf residents, and the oil spill has created challenges for desalination facilities, making available freshwater resources even more scarce. Secondly, economic losses in the Gulf. The damage to the marine environment caused by the oil spill will affect marine-related fisheries and maritime tourism, and the economic costs of combating the oil spill will increase, and the petroleum economy will also be damaged.

# Noor AlShaikh & Alaa AlShehabi

nooralshaikh95@gmail.com
a.shehabi@ucl.ac.uk



**Abstract:**

**Sacrifice Zones on Oil Frontiers: Indigenous struggles for environmental justice in the Bahraini villages of Sitra and Ma'ameer**

On the Eastern side of the archipelago of Bahrain lies the island of Sitra containing the largest industrial complex of oil refineries – the largest belonging to BAPCO, Bahrain's national oil company, desalination plants and factories. The Sitra port, and the navigation of vessels within that area make it of high strategic national importance. Surrounding the refinery are the villages of Ma'ameer, the closet village to the industrial area, as well as Nuwaidrat, Al Eker and East Riffa and Sana. Historically, these villages have formed a rural island periphery – relatively distant from the urban and political centre of Manama. 3 km from the existing BAPCO discharge points, lies Fasht Al-Adham known for the country's best fishing and shrimping ground. The indigenous community relies on fishing as a way of life and livelihood but in recent years fish stocks have dwindled.

This paper attempts to do three things. First, we carry out archival research to understand the colonial logic of placing an oil refinery in the middle of these villages. Secondly, we look at the environmental and political impact on the residents of the villages through ethnographic story-telling using photography and testimony so that subaltern may speak. Finally, we look at the long struggle for justice that ties environmental degradation directly to the radical political views that the people of Sitra have become known for. We argue that on the frontier of oil, there are sacrifice zones that have left indelible health and environmental impacts and are the cause of radical resistance in this small Gulf state.

# Gökçe Günel

Gg15@rice.edu



**Abstract:**

**A Hydrogen Hub**

What are the implications of a global hydrogen economy? A significant player in the energy industry, the United Arab Emirates has been in competition to position itself as a "hydrogen hub," a shorthand for a network of industrial facilities that might facilitate the production and export of hydrogen as a fuel source. Many of the hubs around the world map onto the regions with oil and gas facilities, seeking to offer a retrofit for the stranded assets of the fossil fuel industry while upholding the industry's future. In the UAE context, the hydrogen hub encounters two significant limits – water and land – because hydrogen production requires desalinated water and space to develop renewable energy power stations. Even though the idea of a hub emphasizes connection, in fact, such imaginations of hydrogen hubs pursue disconnection, separating hydrogen as an element from its conditions of production and rendering it globally viable. This paper will track how energy professionals in the UAE do the work of building a hydrogen hub while interrogating the development of hydrogen worldwide, and broadly questioning their place in the energy transition debate.

# Scott Erich

Zgv8fa@virginia.edu



**Abstract:**

**The Oil Age from the Deck of a Fishing Boat**

This paper retells the story of the economic transition "from pearls to oil" in the Gulf from the perspective of a fishing boat. Before the dawn of the petroleum age, fishermen in coastal Arabia drove the local economy. The Peninsula's most important export commodities came not from land, but from the sea: pearls, mother-of-pearl, dried fish, isinglass, and corals. When the Perpetual Maritime Truce of 1853 promised to curtail "piratical enterprises", foreign merchants sought to capitalize on these riches and attempted to deploy trawlers and copper-helmeted diving dress to collect oysters and other marine life at points deeper than the outermost limits of skin-divers and artisanal fishers.

Enacting a policy of deterrence, British officials blended local custom with international maritime norms, begetting novel arrangements of property at sea where the ocean's depths were exclusively for extraction (to "Arab divers"), while its surface was free for navigation to all (a policy which would later be mirrored by the concept of Exclusive Economic Zones). This depth-surface distinction hardened into law when oil companies were granted concessions to extract petroleum from the Gulf and offshore drilling began. Today, many fishermen ignore the enclosures wrought by state boundaries and petroleum companies to reclaim the sea of a commons for fishermen.

Building on archival and ethnographic research, this paper outlines continuities across Arabia's extractive seascape between the age of pearls and the age of oil, and looks to fishermen as bellwethers and throughlines in this transition.

# Natalie Koch

nkoch@syr.edu



**Abstract:**

**Green nationalism from above: Authoritarian state power and the greening of UAE nationalism**

In the dominant global discourse surrounding the contemporary climate crisis, oil- and gas-producing countries are widely framed in a negative light. This presents a challenge for the GCC countries, where resource nationalisms have long celebrated fossil fuels – as the source of wealth, global influence, and a way to maintain national values and assert independence as small states. Yet all nationalisms evolve and have multiple "storylines", which may strengthen or weaken, as they are adapted and adopted by political leaders ,ordinary people, or both.

In the UAE, state-led nationalist discourse has increasingly used the storyline of environmental sustainability to reframe the country's national identity and values as "green". This form green nationalism was incredibly prominent in the UAE's recent hosting of the UN's COP28 climate talks in Dubai in 2023, though the sustainability storyline has circulated in official discourse for at least 20 years. As opposed to many countries in the Euroamerican West, this form of green nationalism is not bottom-up, but a top-down imposition from the Emirati state and is now seen in many official programs, institutions, sites, speeches, and semiotic landscapes.

Building from over 5 years of qualitative research on the UAE's sustainability agenda, this paper investigates state-backed green nationalist storylines through an event ethnography conducted at the Dubai COP28 in December 2023, as well as related events on the UAE National Day 2023 and the country's 2023 themed Year of Sustainability. I argue that Emirati political elites infused green nationalism throughout COP28 and related events, alongside what I describe elsewhere as "spectacular sustainability" (Koch 2023), to legitimate and effect their authoritarian hold on state power. In this political context, I argue that subjects of the state – citizens, noncitizens, private and state companies, institutions and ministries of all varieties – are pushed to perform their obedience to the state through participating in and adopting the new scripts of green nationalism.

# Marwa Koheji

Mk8874@nyu.edu



**Abstract:**

**Air-conditioning and the Sensing of an Oil Modernity in Bahrain**

In the Arab Gulf, the first air-conditioner was installed in the 1930s in Awali, an oil town built by Bahrain British Petroleum Company. Supplying comfort and luxury to Awali's residents, air-conditioning became one of the technological advances that supposedly captured the promise of oil-driven modernization. One might say that in Bahrain, and the larger gulf, air-conditioning generated what historian Rodolph Mrázek (2002) describes as "the sensing of colonial modernity", a phenomenological experience of a life transformed by colonial – and oil-driven – intervention.

But the adoption of air-conditioning was far from a smooth trajectory. Rather, it revealed some of the contradictions, ambivalences, and tensions of oil-based transformation. Focusing on experiences of thermal comfort within Awali from the 1930s to the 1960s, this papers fleshes out some of the processes that characterized the creation of an oil, urban modernity in the Gulf: spatial segregation, racist ideologies of political domination, orientalist environmental tropes, and long-standing colonial discourses about labor and heat that altogether made the promise of an energy-intensive, air-conditioned comfort rather fraught and contentious.

By focusing on air-conditioning, this paper underscores the sensory dimension of oil life-worlds in the Gulf. It shows that use of air-conditioning – a device that today takes up 60 percent of the domestic electrical load – is far from a neutral response to the climate but is rather contingent on a particular colonial history of fossil fuel extraction in the region.

# Florence Wolstenholme

florence.wolstenholme@gmail.com



**Abstract:**

**'Just a real estate project'?: The role of the built environment in constituting "offshore" Dubai**

As Dubai contemplates a future that necessitates economic diversification at a faster pace than its regional neighbours as a result of its relatively smaller hydrocarbon reserves, its rules have enthusiastically pursued a free zone-based model of development. The emirate is now home to dozens of "offshore" zones, an archipelago of legislative islands where regulation is attenuated to allow for maximum capital accumulation. Although Dubai's free zones account for over a third of the emirate's GDP, there is little existing literature that critically examines the built environment of these zones and how this connects to questions surrounding Dubai's urban development in light of its transition away from hydrocarbons.

Drawing on ethnographic and archival research, this paper aims to address this gap through an exploration of the physical spaces of "offshore" Dubai; form the coolness of the shaded walkways, water features and underground airconditioned malls of its flagship financial freezone whose white-collar workers claim has "its own microclimate", to the desert labour camps of the largest free port in the Middle East. In turn, these spatial distinctions are linked to the free zones' social relations and labour regimes, facilitating and restricting engagement along class and race-based hierarchies. Addressing the intersection between regulation and the built environment, the paper further argues that the free zones' unique legal and regulatory regimes play a role in intensifying processes of petrodollar capital switching from the built environment to the financial circuit, thus influencing the direction of Dubai's diversification.

Together, the paper contends that building Dubai's offshore built environment is a fundamentally political practice tied to the development of its political economic future in the context of transition and diversification.

# Natasha Iskander

Natasha.iskander@nyu.edu



**Abstract:**

**Concrete Futures in the Gulf and Beyond**

Concrete—a dense, rough building material made from a mix of cement, broken stone or gravel, sand and water—is everywhere. This human-made substance is second only to water as the most widely used resource on the planet. But in its current form, concrete is also one of the most environmentally destructive. It has a massive carbon footprint: the production of cement, which is the binding factor in concrete, is the source of nearly ten percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, releasing more carbon annually when tallied than any single country save China and the United States. And yet, concrete has the potential to be a major tool for climate change mitigation and adaption. The technologies to turn concrete from one the largest emitters of carbon dioxide to one of our most important inventions for carbon sequestration already exist, but their adoption has been halting and experimental.

Concrete is the stuff out of which the modern Gulf is made. The countries of the region use more concrete per capita than anywhere else in the world, far outstripping countries with comparable levels of wealth, and consumption is only projected to increase over the next decade. Concrete is the medium through which countries of the GCC enact their national imaginaries and their visions for their futures. The built environments through which the Gulf has defined itself are made in concrete, but concrete, in its manufacture and use, has also made the social, economic, and environmental life of the Gulf, shaping everything from labor relations to identities and forms of belonging to the strategies for dealing with climate change.

State-sponsored manufacturers draw on locally abundant petroleum and limestone to produce cheap cement and concrete, in effect using the region's natural resources to reshape the local environment. Even as countries in the region have used concrete to create the built structures for the new knowledge economies that are core to the GGG's various national vision plans, complete with the sustainable architecture that has become part of that model, they have been slow to invest in the knowledge that would actually enable them to scale up technologies to use concrete as a means of carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation.

This paper explores concrete in the Gulf, analyzing it as the material site where relationships between energy, environment, and politics play out. The Gulf is where the global future of concrete and its role in determining the trajectory of climate change will be determined. Will we turn concrete into the material with which we build bunkers against the extreme climate that concrete use itself hastened, or will we use concrete to turn our buildings and roads into carbon stores that soften the effects of climate change? The cities and the governments of the GCC may very likely decide

# Maia Holtermann-Entwistle & Sharri Plonski

m.holtermann-entwistle@qmul.ac.uk

s.plonski@qmul.ac.uk



**Abstract:**

**"If Africa loses, we all lose": Racial genealogies in the UAE's green development projects in Africa**

Recent years have seen an explosion of UAE investment in green energy – what others have described as part of a global energy expansion or intensification. This paper explores UAE's "clean" investments in green technologies across Africa, exemplified by its commitments to the Great Green Wall Initiative against "desertification" in the Sahel, investments in green hydrogen, corporate takeovers of renewable energy companies, and land acquisitions. Excellent existing work in this field has unravelled how Emirati green-energy activities are often naked land grabs (Henderson) and outlets for petrochemical-derived surpluses (Koch). Reorienting our gaze backwards, this paper works with archives to journey across the Sahara and the Sahel, key sites for the UAE's "green" interests, finding direct resonances in two unrealised twentieth century European techno-fantasies about Africa: Eurafrica and Atlanropa/Panropa.

Against the futuristic imaginaries of Emirati green-tech projects in Africa, we sketch their genealogy in these earlier European projects, drawing out two formations that circulate across these different periods of technological intervention: technological spectacle and the promise and possibility of Africa as a site of common salvation through technological innovation. The paper unpacks the racial scaffold that supports both, building on work showing the racial gradients between Blackness, Arabness, and Amazigh/Bedouin produced by European environmental intervention in Africa (Meche) and the longer history of non-European colonialism and slavery in North Africa (Rignall). It does so in order to telescope how, due to these shifts in the direction of energy and technological financing, Emirati green energy ventures in Africa materially and symbolically reengineer this racial scaffold, while continuing to define African environments and lives as sites of extraction.

# Arbella Bet-Shlimon

Shlimon@uw.edu



**Abstract:**

**Producing a Crisis, c. 1961: Iraqi and Kuwaiti Sovereignties, Extraction, and the Environment**

This paper re-examines the Iraqi-Kuwaiti crisis of 1961, triggered by Iraqi leader 'Abd al-Karim Qasim's claim to Kuwait as part of Iraqi territory, and the events that immediately preceded and followed it. Through Iraqi, Kuwaiti, and international media, as well as British archives, it aims to understand how the clashing concepts of Iraqi and Kuwaiti sovereignty were produced through public historical disputes and, crucially, ideas about environmental changes and resource scarcity caused by imperial intervention and the development of the oil industry. There are numerous extant histories of the 1961 crisis that examine it from the perspective of British foreign and military policy because it culminated in the landing of British land, air, and sea forces in and around Kuwait; these accounts also thoroughly discuss Iraq's and Kuwait's respective claims to Kuwait's rightful status that sparred over conflicting understandings of the Ottoman-era history of the region. Through new research, I am building on our understanding of these events by focusing on how environmental claims were also key to Iraqi and Kuwaiti understandings of their own sovereignties, and how these ideas intertwined with disputes over history.

In their initial claims that Kuwait was part of Iraq, Iraqi government sources (including Qasim himself) asserted that Britain had intentionally drawn Kuwait's borders to leave it barren of fresh water supplies so that it could be exploited for oil. At the same time, the Kuwaiti press proudly reported that Kuwait was beginning to extract fresh water from its own underground aquifers, ensuring that it would no longer need to import water from Iraq. In the early 1960s, the concept of resource sovereignty was central to anticolonial politics, and pan-Arabism was at the peak of its influence; the competing Iraqi and Kuwaiti claims were thus made within pan-Arabist frameworks, though with differing concepts of what that meant. Ultimately, I argue that the 1961 crisis is a key moment for understanding how Iraqi and Kuwaiti anticolonial politics had dramatically shifted since the 1930s, as well as for tracing the roots of how competing Iraqi and Kuwaiti sovereignties became entangled with Western imperial politics in contradictory ways thirty years later. This moment was produced in the nexus of oil, water, and—although the concept did not yet exist locally—a warming climate.