

I U A E S

Commission on the Middle East

Krakow, August 10-12, 2017

Chair of the Commission: Dr. Soheila Shahshahani
Executive Secretary of the Commission: Marzieh Kaivanara

Panels:

1. Food, Family, and Fellowship: The Ethnography of Culinary Work in The Middle East

Proposed by:

Prof. Mary Hegland, Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Santa Clara University,
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&

Dr. Nefissa Naguib

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This panel focuses on various aspects of the highly significant food culture and social organization in the Middle East. Those who produce, prepare, serve, share, donate, receive, and eat food are embedded in identity and connectivity. Family and kin, religious and spiritual, community and political groups give meaning to food. From ties among family members in daily life, all the way through community and religious gatherings, and yearly festivals, national identities and traditions are associated with food. Thus food carries great significance, and value. Food and its preparation and eating can define family and kinship groups and fractures. People use food to commemorate life-cycle rituals and convey messages about class, geographical, generational, and modern versus traditional membership. Food donated during religious commemorations can send messages and aspirations about religious identity, level of piety and material success, connections with spiritual figures, political ties and power, and/or personal problems and desires. Food can carry caring or indicate disapproval and resistance. Ethnographer conducting research about transformations in food culture, preparation, or meanings—vegetarian movements, food for health, critiques of massive donations during particular times, development of TV cooking classes and how they are received, or challenges for food producers or transporters are welcomed to participate in this session.

The panel participants:

Saideh Saidi. PhD candidate in Ethnology and Cultural Studies, Bremen University, Germany. proposed paper: *Food and Identity: Changes in Afghan Culinary Culture*

2.The Cultural Expression of the Relationship Between Human/God Through Oral or Written Culture

Proposed by:

Prof. Kim Shively,

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In the Middle East, religiosity is often practiced in group gatherings. Religious practice is often integrated with community, kinship, neighborhood, and settlement organization and interaction. Furthermore, ethnographers can observe how religious beliefs, ideas, and practices are developed, disseminated, and modified. They can also understand how individuals see the connections among themselves, the sacred and religious groups and practices.

Through working at the community and group level, anthropologists are often able to uncover the personal attitudes, beliefs, society, and local-level culture, interaction and aspirations related to religion and ideas about the world and identity. By drawing on fieldwork, participant observation, interviewing, and/or discussion with people at the popular level, they can bring the world of people on the ground and how they consider God and religion and how they carry out rituals and practices related to their religious and spiritual understandings and their hopes for delivery from problems. Papers should try to find ways to better understand what people focus on and give significance to in giving meaning of their religious beliefs and practices.

In this special session, close observation and interaction among individuals and groups as they approach the divine, religion, and spirituality will be topical.

The panel participants:

*Professor Mary Hegland

*Nima Jangouk, PhD. Candidate. School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies. University of Ottawa. proposed paper: *'Blowing with the Divine Wind: An Exploration of Muslim Winds as Mediators between God and human in Qeshm Island, Iran'*

3. Anthropological Perspectives of Documentary Films About Women in the Middle East

Proposed by:

Prof. Esther Hertzog

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&

Prof. Yael Katzir
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In their groundbreaking book *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) illustrate the linkages between visual and social anthropology and between anthropological gazes and artistic visions. They perceive "observational filmmaking" as "... a mode of inquiry that sticks close to lived experience and [that] seeks to render the finely grained texture of lived experience" (ibid: xiv). This kind of social exploration bridges the art and anthropology divide, thus "... a new dialogue has begun to take shape between artists and anthropologists..." (ibid: xii).

It appears that documentary films can offer, sometimes unintentionally, surprising and unfamiliar picture of reality, which otherwise would not be identified or acknowledged. Moreover, the interaction between documentaries and anthropology emerges as "the critical site for a convergence of different perspectives around the visual..." (ibid: xii).

The proposed panel will relate to documentary films about women in the Middle East. It will discuss various aspects of women's lives and struggles as they are reflected on film. The conspicuous value of documentary films will emphasize: A. the potential of ethnographic documentation as means for learning about women's lives and struggles within their societies;

B. The significant contribution of "observational cinema" to the "investigation of technique and forms of knowledge in anthropological research..." and as "a new context for the exploration of the sensory, material and subjective dimensions of field work..." (ibid: xii).

Issues like violence against women, women's leadership, women's struggles for equality, cultural and religious constraints on women in Middle East societies, women participation in military activities, women's economic struggles and so on, are some of the topics that can be relevant for the panel.

Documentary filmmakers and social/cultural anthropologists interested in documentary films on the Middle East from women's/gender perspectives are invited to propose abstracts for this panel. The film makers and the anthropologists on the panel will elaborate on social, cultural and political aspects that the films reflect, as well as the discrepancy between narratives' analysis and a film based on a compelling narrative. The discussion can expose local/national/global implications that emerge from the "small" picture depicted by personal narratives, protagonists' life stories, their expectations, frustrations, motivations etc. The film makers will discuss the professional/artistic challenges they faced while filming and editing their films and more. A few screened excerpts from the discussed documentaries will serve to demonstrate the main arguments and insights.

The panel participants:

Prof. Yael Katzir, Abir Zeibak Haddad and Esther Hertzog

4. Middle Eastern Diaspora in Europe and in Latin America

Proposed by:

Leonardo Schiocchet (ISA); Cecília Baeza (PUC-SP); Paulo Pinto (UFF)
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This panel aims at discussing contemporary migration, forced and otherwise, from the Middle East to Europe and Latin America in comparative perspective. Mashreqi migration to Latin America peaked in the first half of the 20th Century. Ships carrying these migrants passed through European ports, such as Marseille, Genova and Barcelona. However, while France has had a steady Maghrebi and Lebanese populations since at least the onset of its colonial entrepreneurship in the region, it was not until the 1980s that Mashreqi presence in Europe at large became demographically significant. Palestinian refugees arrived first in Germany, and then Denmark and Sweden, before spreading in the region. As today large groups of Syrians arrive in Europe, not only has the Arab presence in the continent achieved a new high, but also it turns Middle Easterners into a very visible population, one that has been particularly influential of both contrastive identity and policy. Panel papers will discuss historical and contemporary processes of migration, forced or otherwise, and community building in Latin America and Europe in comparative perspective as one case may produce insight on the other.

5. Female Authority in the Middle East in Political, Economic, Social, Ideological And Ethical Domains

Proposed by:

Safaa Monqid,
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This session could include ethnographies of women's everyday life in urban, rural and pastoral nomadic areas. The managerial tasks of women should be explored.

6. Anthropology of Art & Architecture

Proposed by:

Dr. Farniyaz Zaker
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The architecture surrounding us is not static but changes in accordance with the altering needs and habits of society and individuals. At the same time, we are contemplating the built environment surrounding us; we live in and with it; we experience it with all our sense, especially optically and tactilely. In other words, we make architecture as architecture makes us. Examining this mutual relationship, Janet

Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones (1995) have gone so far as to argue that the body and its built environment are one entity. The relationship between the body and the built environment is manifold indeed. Architecture translates into social space, thereby sanctioning certain norms of behaviour. It affects us somatically and psychologically. We make cognitive maps of it, and it leaves an imprint in our motor memory. We commit it to our memory, and it evokes memories in us. Our bodies and minds are permeated and enriched by the memory of architectural places. Parallels can be drawn between the way we experience both architecture and art. Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' compares architecture to film and highlights the durable effect that films have on us. Benjamin argues that films, unlike other art forms, such as painting, stimulate not only our sense of vision but also our sense of touch. In a similar vein, Bernard Berenson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Juhani Pallasmaa have maintained that eyes can touch, i.e. that our gaze allows us to identify with objects and to grasp them. Consequently, not just film but also other media, such as painting or photography, although primarily visual, are capable of stimulating our haptic system. They can touch us not just metaphorically but literally. Art and architecture engage our perceptual system in similar ways. Moreover, our perception of them is both shaping our identity and shaped by it. The multitude of stimuli that prompt us to identify ourselves, to behave and move in certain ways and to favour particular gestures or ways of speaking over others, cannot be reduced to art and architecture alone. Still, what Pierre Bourdieu has called the habitus is certainly also shaped by the built environment surrounding us, and its influence is more powerful and enduring than is often assumed. This makes it more crucial to study art and architecture (separately or jointly) as pivotal loci in anthropology. This panel invites papers using theoretical and/or empirical research on a broad range of case studies from the MENA region and beyond. We are interested in how people's awareness of space, identity, and their social habits are crucially mediated through where they are. We invite papers from a wide range of critical and theoretical approaches to the anthropological study of art & architecture. And we are particularly interested in studies with phenomenological approaches.

7. Gender and Religion

Proposed by:

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&

Nefissa Naguib,

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The Middle East is the birthplace of the world's major religions, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and many relevant minority ones. Over many centuries, these religions have reached beyond their religious and spiritual remit and have acted as a guiding principle for more practical and everyday actions of

individuals, meaning that they are inextricably involved in and have penetrated almost all the social institutions from economic, legal, moral and ethical, to political. This presence is also visible in defining the boundaries of the relationship between men and women, which affects family and kinship and, by implication, the stability of the society.

Although the abundant contemporary Middle East scholarship on gender and religion has been instrumental in unraveling some of the stereotyping of the relationship between men and women, continuing with new research is an imperative as gender relations are changing and taking many turns and twists and remain in a state of flux. The changes stem from a variety of factors including education, globalisation, considerable increase in female labour market participation, and migrations. But, they are also due to the more recent turbulent political events in the Middle Eastern countries, which inevitably have had implications for and have affected gender relations in both negative and positive and often unexpected ways.

This panel invites contributions from scholars whose research falls within the areas of the interaction between religious texts/ settings/places/sites and their impact on gender relations. Proposals could include a wide range of issues including links between religious guidance/text and politics, economics, and social and cultural practices in relation to people's everyday life and interaction.

8: Ethno-history of the Middle East

Proposed by:

Fakhri Haghani

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Ethno-history of the Middle East is definitely a very rich topic, given the massive documentation existing in the area. This could be a search for origins of various social science disciplines to a search for various activities, crafts and behaviors, to different subsistences, or a search for context to a specific problem. Given that erudition has been a very respectable practice in the area, anthropologists can no longer ignore this past, and just engage in their everyday life ethnographies. The vast amount of documentation on great many issues can enlighten us in numerous ways.

The panel participants:

Dr Soheila Shahshahani, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran.

9: Body, Subjectivity and Stage/Screen Performance

Proposed by:

Ida Meftahi, University of Maryland

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What is the relationship between performing body and self on stage/screen

performance, and how the stage/screen self relates to the performer's quotidian self. The discussion is open to fields of music, dance, theatre, television and cinema.

10. Middle East in Distress: Round Table Presentation & Discussion

Convenor:

Dr. Soheila Shahshahani, Shahid Beheshti University.

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Whether we are living in the Middle East or working on it, we know that we are passing very difficult years in this area. As anthropologists our task is to write the everyday life of people, but our contact with what is truly happening in the area is mostly through media. Very few of us are seeing the effect of war, migration, exodus, hunger, separation, destruction... Most of us have taken marginal positions, unrelated to these harsh realities, and looking away from any deep analysis and leaving it to political scientists, economist, specialists of international affairs etc. We live on the margins, while we know that our essential task of reporting from the field is left to journalists. Privately we engage in analysis of the situation, but perhaps it is time we made more analysis on the media from which we like all others are getting our information, and on the literature we worked on as students of anthropology which concerned other regions of the world, the Americas and Africa. Is the Middle East seriously facing colonialism of the 21st century, losing its diverse relics, sites, everyday life customs, religions, all intricately woven identities? What is the role of media in informing the world on what is really happening in the Middle East? What is the role of anthropology informing the world on what is happening in the Middle East? How much are we informed, how much misinformed, and we as anthropologists what are we presenting in our works which deepens the public's view of the Middle East? You will be welcomed to use primary or secondary sources to discuss your views. How can we define our position and stand point as specialists of everyday life in the Middle East in view of what is happening in the area.

All Participants are invited to this round table panel

Five Minutes Presentation of each scholar

Please send your **panel proposals** to the chair of the commission, Dr Soheila Shahshahani no later than **April 15th**.

Please send an **abstract** of a maximum of 200 words by **15th of June** with your name, email address, university/institutional affiliation, and a short biography to the corresponding panel organiser(s) and C.C:

Soheila Shahshahani (Chair of the Commission): soheilairan@gmail.com

&

Marzieh Kaivanara (Executive Secretary of the Commission):

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