

February till

June 2023

# THE

القصة التي نرويها

# STORIES

materializing  
energy geographies

# WE TELL



The stories we tell matter. It matters not only what they say about others and ourselves but also how we craft them. This seminar series engages scholars, activists and artists of the Middle East and North Africa working across disciplines and national boundaries for a set of crossed conversations on critical and creative theoretical and methodological practices. The current political moment and the ravages of empire across the region demand that we unlearn and rethink forms of knowing to foreground histories and struggles on the margins. We envisage this series as a way to collectively learn about and explore methods and approaches that can nourish and transform knowledge production and dissemination on a wide range of social, political, economic and environmental issues.

An online seminar series by the Observatory of the Arab and Muslim Worlds with the support of Recherche et Études en Politique Internationale (REPI) and Maison des Sciences Humaines (MSH), and Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Convened by Omar Jebary Salamanca

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SESSION I · February 1st 2023 · 12H (CET)

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# Crude Knowledge: Decolonisation, Nationalisation, and Hydrocarbon Epistemologies

**Laleh Khalili**

Queen Mary University of London

How did decolonisation and postcolonial geopolitics shape the contours of Arab knowledge about oil? Who were the experts and polemicists and scholars that created a hydrocarbon episteme on the pages of numerous Arabic language scholarly, political and commercial journals and magazines about oil? In this essay, based on a review of the complete archives of several Arabic language oil/ gas and commercial journals between the 1950s and the present time, I will argue that oil was transformed from the knowable material of everyday life and struggle into an abstract, distant and illegible subject of specialised knowledge. I will elucidate the fragmentation of hydrocarbon knowledge, specialisation and jargonisation, and ascendancy of quantitative, descriptive, categoric and macro methods of understanding over qualitative, analytic, interpretive, and micro methods.

*Laleh Khalili is a professor of international politics at Queen Mary University of London and the author of *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge 2007), *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford 2013) and *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula* (Verso 2020).*

# On the Remarkable Role of Economic Science in Calculating Iran's Democratic Future through the Reassembly of a Dam in the mid-20th century

**Katayoun Shafiee**

University of Warwick

A burgeoning scholarship has taken seriously the use and management of the world's fresh water as a site of critical investigation, highlighting the contribution of science and technology studies in making the infrastructural life of water visible. However, studies say little about the calculative terms of the decision-making process involved in infrastructural appraisal which are often taken for granted as something inevitable. This paper examines the unexpected and remarkable role that cost-benefit analysis played in governing Iran's democratic future through the assembling of a dam in the mid-20th century. Indeed, cost-benefit analysis traveled the world via flows of water. I investigate the ways in which the calculation of risk generated by the device of cost-benefit analysis of neoclassical economics became over several decades the most influential language for explaining and organizing the relationship between humans and nature, including the soil, in southwest Iran. The waters of the Dez River and other major rivers of the world shaped the building of large-scale infrastructural projects around dams, but they were simultaneously entangled with the production of economic information about the costs and benefits to local areas, making possible the development of new methods of governing democracies in terms of risk. US-based government aid agencies, institutions of global economic governance, private American investors, engineers, and soil scientists converged in a small corner of Iran to transform the region, its water, and its farmers into a laboratory of grass-roots democracy for a profit.

*Katayoun Shafiee is Associate Professor of the History of the Modern Middle East at the University of Warwick, Department of History. She is currently working on her second book project, *Governing Democratic Futures: Risky Measures along an Iranian waterway, 1920-79* which explores the role of neoclassical economics in the politics of international water resource development in Iran. Her publications on the topic of energy development have appeared in *Social Studies of Science*, the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Economy and Society*, and *History Compass*. She is the author of *Machineries of Oil: An Infrastructural History of BP in Iran* (MIT Press, 2018).*

SESSION II · March 1st 2023 · 15H (CET)

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## Blowing Sand: Oil Camps, Security and Labour in the Gulf

**Andrea Wright**

William & Mary

Drawing on ethnographic materials collected in India and the UAE, this talk looks at the role of camps and security in structuring contemporary labor conditions in the Gulf. In particular, I focus on how camps and security reinforce racialized labor hierarchies and the isolation of migrant laborers. By exploring the experiences of migrant laborers in the context of oil company practices, I demonstrate contemporary labor conditions in the Gulf are not exceptional, but rather, are a consequence of global managerial practices.

*Andrea Wright is an Associate Professor of Anthropology and the Director of Asian & Middle Eastern Studies at William & Mary. Her first book, *Between Dreams and Ghosts: Indian Migration and Middle Eastern Oil*, is an ethnography of Indian migration to oil and gas projects in the Gulf. She is currently finishing her second book, which examines the history of labor and oil production in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula through exploring the relationships among governments, oil companies and mobile workforces.*



# The Intimacy of Oil: Aramco, Arabia and Empire

**Munira Khayyat**

American University in Cairo

This is a genealogical and familial work of scholarship embroidered by three sisters across disciplines and practices that plumbs the affective and intimate spaces of empire by way of their mother's memoir of growing up in Aramco and their maternal grandfather's vast photographic archive throughout the decades of his employment there. Bringing the diverse capacities of different disciplines, approaches and processes to bear upon the embodied history of empire, this sisterly work is a feminist re-ordering of archives, narratives, memories and the place of the political in the viscera of our ordinary life-worlds.

*Munira Khayyat teaches anthropology at the American University in Cairo. She is the author of *A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival* (University of California).*



# Oilmen, Petroleum Arabism and OPEC New Political and Public Cultures of Oil in the Arab world, 1959–1964

**Nelida Fuccaro**

NYU Abu Dhabi

The Public Relation efforts of foreign controlled oil companies in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia started to make the industry visible to the public at home and abroad in a variety of incarnations: technology, infrastructure, public projects, employer, educator and even as a tourist amenity for prospective overseas employees. By branding its industrial entrepreneurship as spectacle and welfare, the company attempted to capture the attention, imagination and loyalty of people whose lives were increasingly exposed to and touched by the industry, either through employment, participation in national life, social advancement, or material culture. This talk will discuss how the oil industry and technology was portrayed in words and images popularised by companies' magazines and official reports, in other words how the companies' PR outreach started to expose the guts of the industry, seemingly lifting the veil of secrecy and aloofness that had surrounded oil's technological zones in the Arab World.

*Nelida Fuccaro is Professor of Middle Eastern History at NYU Abu Dhabi, formerly based at SOAS University of London. In the last few years she has researched the history of the social, material and visual cultures of oil and modernity in the Gulf, Iraq and Arabian Peninsula, and she has recently edited with Mandana Limbert a volume entitled Life Worlds of Middle Eastern Oil: Histories and Ethnographies of Black Gold (Edinburgh University Press, 2023). She is currently writing a monograph on oil cultures and societies in the Arab World. Her previous work focussed on port and oil cities, public violence, and on the interplay between ethnicity and nationalism in frontier societies. She is the author of The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq (London: IB Tauris, 1999), Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800 (Cambridge University Press, 2009, paperback 2011), the guest editor of the thematic contribution 'Histories of Oil and Urban Modernity in the Middle East' in Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East (2013), the co-editor of Urban Violence in the Middle East (Berghahn, 2015), and the editor of Violence and the City in the Modern Middle East (Stanford University Press, 2016).*

# Black Gold Seekers: French oil companies in colonial and postcolonial Algeria. Workforce policies, circulation of knowledge and social identities (1945-1973)

**Radouan Andrea Mounecif**

Sorbonne University

The mastery of the oil exploration and production techniques has been an essential condition for the development of the French oil industry. Starting from this assumption, my presentation will explain how the workforce policies and the staff training programs have fostered the expansion of the oil sector, supporting the emergence of a new technical élite. If the lack of national energy policy has been one of the main causes of French industrial underdevelopment, the inauguration of a national oil exploration program in 1945 changed the situation. Thanks to the joint effort of the Compagnie Française des Pétroles (today TotalEnergies) and the French national oil authorities, several oil reservoirs were discovered in colonized Algeria in 1956. The emergence of the black gold seekers as a socio-professional group assured the exploitation of oil resources and supported the technological emancipation of the country. In less than two decades the French oilman working in the Sahara became the symbol of the energetic abundance and the new consumption era. Nevertheless, the Algerian War and the decolonization process deeply undermined the position of French companies during the 1960s. Only the implementation of new human resources management strategies guaranteed stability and a privileged access to foreign energy resources. In a period characterized by the industrial nationalizations that took place in the Arab countries and the 1973 oil shock, the local staff training programs fostered the emergence of a new form of cooperation between the oil companies and local governments. In this new phase, French engineer and technicians contributed to the circulation of knowledge and French oil technology all around the world.



**Radouan Andrea Mounecif** is a PhD in contemporary history at Sorbonne University and archivist in charge of Science Po institutional archives. Graduated MA in History and Political Sciences, he studied at Università degli Studi di Padova, Université Paris 8 and Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (Beirut) before continuing his specialization in Archival Science and Records Management. Formerly responsible of TotalEnergies Historical Archives, he worked in public libraries and private corporate archives as project manager in charge of the digital transformation and the valorization of the historical collections. His main area of research interest is related to Economic and Social History of Energy, History of Sciences and Technology and History of Consumption. His PhD thesis is titled “Black Gold Seekers: : French Oilmen from the Sahara to the World (1924-2003). Men, Knowledge and Representations” and will be published in 2024.




## Fluid History: Oil Workers and the Iranian Revolution

**Peyman Jafari**

William and Mary

When Iranian oil workers went on strike in October 2022 during the protests that emerged around the slogan ‘women, life, liberty’, observers were quick to make comparisons with the critical role of oil workers in the 1978-79 revolution. This paper looks at how and why the oil strikes of 1978 played a crucial role in the downfall of the Pahlavi monarchy and argues that these strikes were key to the emergence of institutions that facilitated the power transition to the Islamic Republic. In doing so, this paper makes three contributions: it recasts the relationship between oil and politics through labor history; demonstrates the contingent nature of Iran’s revolutionary outcome; and emphasizes the nature of revolutions as moments of possibilities. Finally, drawing on this historical analysis, the paper briefly discusses the potential of oil strikes in contemporary Iran.

*Peyman Jafari is Assistant Professor of History and International Relations at the College of William and Mary (Williamsburg, Virginia) and a research fellow at the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam). His research focuses on the relationship between empires, labor, and ecology in the global history of oil, the social history of revolutions and the role of the labor movement in contemporary Iran. He is the author of *Der andere Iran: Geschichte und Kultur von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart* (C.H. Beck, 2010). He has co-edited two volumes: *Iran in the Middle East: Transnational Encounters and Social History* (IB Tauris, 2015) and *Worlds of Labor Turned Upside Down: Labor Relations and Revolutions in Global Perspective* (Brill, 2021). His most recent publication is “Labour in the Making of the International Relations of Oil: Resource Nationalism and Trade Unions,” in Roland Dannreuther and Wojciech Osrowski (eds.), *Handbook of Oil and International Relations* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022). He is currently writing a monograph titled *Oil and Labor in the Iranian Revolution: A Social History of Uneven and Combined Development*.*




# The Brotherhood of Labor: Oil Capital, Masculinity, and the Making of the Lebanese Working Class

**Zachary Davis Cuyler**

New York University

This paper examines the labour history of Trans-Arabian Pipeline, or Tapline, a U.S.-owned pipeline company that carried Saudi crude to an oil terminal on the Lebanese coast. It shows how Lebanese Tapline employees developed nationalist and masculinist conceptions of the working class--which I term the “brotherhood of labor” – in confrontations with international oil capital.

*Zachary Davis Cuyler is a PhD candidate at New York University. His work focuses on the historical and contemporary politics of infrastructure, energy, and the environment in the mashriq. His commentary has appeared in Middle East Report, Synaps, and L'Orient-Le Jour and his academic work has appeared in International Labor and Working-Class History, Historical Materialism, and the Arab Studies Journal. Zachary's dissertation, "Fossil Lebanon," examines how Lebanon's relationship to the regional oil industry shaped the country's politics, economy, and built environment.*



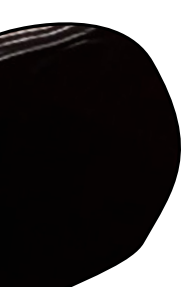
# Renewable Energy in Tunisia: dependency, privatization and local struggles

## Chafik Ben Rouine

The Tunisian Observatory of Economy (TOE)

While Tunisia is now entering a new energy transition, following its international commitments, almost no debate has occurred at the national level on the redistributive aspects of this transition, which raises crucial questions. For instance, who will benefit and who will lose from this transition? Who controls the knowledge and technology that will be used to implement this transition and to what extent will this transition deepen Tunisia's historical dependency on imperial powers? Will this energy transition open the door to the liberalization and the privatization of the energy sector? To what extent will this energy transition help to address the issues of structural unemployment and inequality in the country? Will this transition facilitate an increase in democratic control over natural resources or will it exacerbate capitalistic land-grabbing at the expense of local communities?

*Chafik Ben Rouine is the co-founder and the President of the Tunisian Observatory of Economy (TOE). He has 10 years of experience in development economics (agriculture, energy, social protection, inequality and poverty), international finance (international financial system, and international financial institutions), monetary policy, trade (free trade agreements, WTO mechanisms), tax justice (IFE, tax and domestic resource mobilisation) in Tunisia and the MENA region.*



# New Masks, Old Colonialism: Wind Energy Projects in the Occupied Western Sahara and the Syrian Golan Heights

**Noura Alkhalidi, Muna Dajani  
and Yahia Mahmoud**

The dominant global narratives about the state of the planet and its inhabitants are presented as neutral proposals serving the common interest of 'mankind'. At the heart of these narratives, we find concepts such as environmental peace-building, sustainable development and climate change mitigation, that have been critiqued for not only their lack of neutrality, but their contribution to the denial of basic human rights such as self-determination, sovereignty, and ultimately, the right to exist. This article exemplifies the above and further explores the connections between 'green extractivism' and illegally occupied territories through a critical overview of dominant concepts such as sustainable development and ecological modernization. We argue that renewable energy projects are a manifestation of ecological modernization that is completely ignoring aspects of justice and self-determination of communities undergoing (settler) colonial control. We do so by delving into wind energy projects in occupied Western Sahara and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. Although touted as a solution to mitigating climate change, wind energy development in these two cases violates international law and the principle of self-determination. We show how narratives about climate change mitigation are used to justify illegal land occupation and prolong the colonial project by using 'new' means.

*Noura AlKhalili is a Postdoctoral fellow at the Human Ecology Division, Department of Human Geography/ Lund University. Her current research engages with energy transitions in North Africa, the potential energy export from North Africa to Europe, green extractivism and violent conflicts, and energy justice. She holds a PhD in Human Geography from Lund University.*

*Muna Dajani holds a PhD from the Department of Geography and Environment at the London School of Economics (LSE). Her research focuses on documenting water struggles in agricultural communities under settler colonialism. She is a Senior Research*

*Associate at the Lancaster Environment Centre (LEC) where she works on a project entitled "Transformations to Groundwater Sustainability" (T2GS), exploring grassroots initiatives of intergenerational holistic groundwater governance. She has contributed to numerous studies on the hydropolitics of the Jordan and Yarmouk River Basins. She also co-led a collaboration project documenting the story of the occupation of the Syrian Golan through developing an online knowledge portal featuring collective memories of the popular struggle in the region.*

**Yahia Mahmoud** is senior lecturer in Human Geography and Development Studies. Before turning to geography, he studied international relations and political science in Latin America, Development Studies in Sweden and China's socio-economic transformation at South China Normal University in Canton. Nowadays, his research interest is within the confines of development geography and development studies, but he also deals with issues of energy transition in rural areas, innovation in the global south, as well as political ecology.

**L'Observatoire des Mondes Arabes et Musulmans (OMAM)** est une entité d'études transdisciplinaire faisant partie de la Maison des Sciences Humaines, avec une dynamique de recherche commune autour de questions transversales secouant les mondes arabes et musulmans contemporains. OMAM a comme mission de formation à la recherche, d'accueil et de dissémination du savoir. Les terrains de cette entité s'inscrivent dans une aire géographique vaste, allant du Maghreb au Machreq méditerranéens (Turquie et Israël inclus), de l'Afrique subsaharienne musulmane (notamment le Soudan, le Tchad, le Mali et la Mauritanie) et du Golfe persique (Iran et Monarchies du Golfe). Les thématiques d'OMAM portent sur la littérature, la culture, l'art, l'histoire, la politique, la société et la religion dans les mondes arabes et musulmans. Haut lieu de confrontation théorique et méthodologique, OMAM accueille des projets de recherches, des séminaires, des colloques et des formations destinés au public académique et organise des conférences ouvertes au grand public.

**The Observatory of the Arab and Muslim Worlds (OMAM)** is a transdisciplinary study entity that is part of the Maison des Sciences Humaines, with a research focus around transversal issues shaping the contemporary Arab and Muslim worlds. OMAM's mission is to train for research, to host and disseminate knowledge. The Fields of study of this entity cover a vast geographical area, from the Maghreb to the Mediterranean Mashreq (including Turkey and Israel), from Muslim sub-Saharan Africa (notably Sudan, Chad, Mali and Mauritania) and the Persian Gulf (Iran and the Gulf Monarchies). OMAM's themes cover literature, culture, art, history, politics, society and religion in the Arab and Muslim worlds. As a place of theoretical and methodological confrontation, OMAM hosts research projects, seminars, colloquia and training courses for the academic public and organises conferences open to the general public.