



berlin graduate school
muslim cultures and societies

Call for Papers

IN SEARCH FOR THE KINGDOM

—

EMERGING SCHOLARSHIP ON SAUDI ARABIA: FROM THE FIRST SAUDI STATE TO THE PRESENT

An international workshop co-organized by
the doctoral students at the

Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) &
Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies
(BGSMCS)

12th – 14th June 2013

Abstract

Research on Saudi Arabia, though previously very limited and on the fringes of disciplines such as Anthropology, History and Islamic Studies, has been expanding fast in recent years. The increase in publications on Saudi Arabia partially reflects a political opening *of* and easier access *to* the Kingdom. It is also an expression, however, of an increasing Western public awareness and media interest. In the midst of globalization, post-Orientalism and the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia still holds to be as the exotic “Other” *per se* evoking images of the desert and the Bedouin, land of plenty of petroleum and breeding ground of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Against this background, this workshop will provide the opportunity to bring together young researchers working on Saudi Arabia, thereby aiming to create an interdisciplinary platform for exchange. The workshop approaches new research trends on Saudi Arabia from two perspectives: it aims at fostering a substantial academic, interdisciplinary discussion within the emerging scholarship on Saudi Arabia, as well as addressing practical and methodological questions on researching the Kingdom.

Description and Rationale

In the workshop jointly organized by the doctoral students at the [Zentrum Moderner Orient \(ZMO\)](#) and the [Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies \(BGS MCS\)](#) we wish to bring together researchers, who are in the process of writing their PhD-thesis or have recently completed their dissertation, and explore topics settled in what is today the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We invite papers that range from the time of the so called First Saudi State to the present.

Academic work on Saudi Arabia traditionally has been focusing on the royal family, the modernization of the country and the political economy of the rentier state, the relation of ulema and the regime and, finally, questions of gender segregation. Other aspects such as the history of migration, social movements or the role of the media in recent discourses on state and society appear hugely underrepresented. However, partially due to better access to the Kingdom, a new generation of Saudi specialists adopts new trends and untouched themes of research. With the planned workshop we would like to offer a platform of meaningful exchange on shared interests. What are emerging themes of scholarship on Saudi Arabia? How does current scholarship relate to previous studies and how does it challenge old narratives?

A second set of questions that we would like to address in this workshop relates to the process of doing research on Saudi Arabia. What are the specificities of doing research in the Kingdom and how can a researcher cope with challenges, such as limited access to archives, he or she might face in the country. What influence do specific customs and traditions of society and politics have on the kind of empirical evidence collected and how do they influence the methodology of the researcher? For example, how could a researcher critically reflect on the scope and representativeness of his or her research in face of a heavily gender segregated society?

Our intention is to throw some light upon themes and trends in emerging scholarship on Saudi Arabia and to generate an interdisciplinary conversation on a country of which many aspects are still not very well studied. We thus welcome proposals from a large variety of disciplines, including but not limited to History, Anthropology, Religious Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Political Sciences, Literature, Sociology and Arts.

The organisers will provide partial funding for travel expenses of select participants. However, in order to allow as many young scholars as possible to participate at the workshop, we encourage and support researchers' applications for travel grants at their home institutions.

We are planning to publish high quality papers in a conference volume presenting new themes and methodological reflexions on emerging scholarship on Saudi Arabia.

Workshop Themes and Anticipated Papers

The convenors propose the following themes to be discussed in selected panels during the workshop. However, as it is our aim to identify new themes, the list does not intend to be exhaustive. We are looking forward to further suggestions by potential contributors.

- **History and historiography**

Research in urban/rural history and history of urbanization; history of urban/rural movements and mobilization; entangled histories of migration and travelling elites; historiography in Saudi Arabia; etc.

- **Aesthetic forms of expression and popular culture**

Studies on traditional productions of culture ranging from poetry to dress and food; new forms of cultural expression such as the novel and new media; the influence of migration on Saudi popular culture; cosmopolitan culture of pilgrimage and merchants; etc.

- **Religion in Saudi Arabia**

New perspectives on the role of 'ulema and religious discourse in the Kingdom, religious movements and dissent; religious minorities and majorities; process and formation of religious customs and traditions; etc.

- **Social Mobilization and the Question of Civil Society**

Research on the role of new media in social movements; applied social movement or governance theory in the Kingdom; forms of political participation, collective autonomy and civil society in Saudi Arabia; civic engagement and the voluntary sector; etc.

- **From Rentier State Theory to New 'Bourgeoisie'**

- **Questions on Legal History**

- **Issues of Good Governance**

Submissions

Abstracts should be sent by E-mail to Nora Derbal (nora.derbal@bgsmcs.fu-berlin.de) and Claudia Schröder (claudia.schroeder@zmo.de) by **1st December 2012**. Please include your name and institutional affiliation in the body of the E-mail, and attach your paper title and 400-word abstract as a Word document. Submissions should clearly state the theme and related discipline(s) of the paper and should give some indication of sources and methodology.

Participants are asked to submit a paper by **1st May 2013** to be circulated before the workshop.

Timeline

1st December 2012 Deadline for abstract submissions

Mid-January 2013 Notification of accepted abstracts

1st May 2012 Deadline for full paper submissions

12th-14th June International Workshop at the ZMO and BGSMCS, Berlin

Contact & Organizers

Nora Derbal is a doctoral student in Islamic Studies at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies (BGS MCS), Free University Berlin. Her PhD thesis is on “Charity for the Poor and Benevolent Engagement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia”. Her e-mail is: derbal@bgsmcs.fu-berlin.de.

Claudia Schroeder is a research fellow at the ZMO (Zentrum Moderner Orient) and a doctoral student at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Her current research project at the ZMO is “The Appropriation of Space: Popular Protests in Saudi Arabian Oil Towns, 1953-1967”. In her doctoral thesis she is studying the transformation of space and governance in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern province in the 1950s and 1960s. Her e-mail is: claudia.schroeder@zmo.de.