Michael C. Hudson, the Seif Ghobash Professor of International Relations and Arab Studies, Emeritus, at Georgetown University, delivered the first CIRS Monthly Dialogue of the Spring 2016 semester on “The U.S.–Saudi Arabia Relationship: ‘Special’ or Broken?” on January 19, 2016. A long-term scholar of the Middle East, Hudson argued that the region is in an extremely turbulent condition, necessitating the reexamination of traditional alliances. He paid particular attention to the state of the US-Saudi relationship, which was once described as “special” and which is now under considerable strain.

Highlighting some key moments in the history of the US-Saudi relationship, Hudson noted that it was established after World War I, when companies backed by the US government began formalizing business ties and facilitating the Saudi oil industry during the 1930s. Subsequently, “a modus vivendi was established that allowed this engine of modernization to function without really interfacing with, or let alone disturbing, the traditional political culture of the Kingdom,” he argued. In order for this businesses relationship to continue flourishing, the Americans remained uncharacteristically uncritical of the domestic politics of Saudi Arabia. This arrangement suited both parties, as each could get along with its business interests despite having many antithetical notions regarding each other’s cultures, religions, and politics. In this regard, Hudson argued that “the relationship, although special, was not deeply rooted in American politics, in the American mind, or within the American public. The relationship depended upon a rather narrow spectrum of interests, expertise, and influence,” and was established on a strategic basis between political and business elites.

In order to further secure these shared US-Saudi economic interests, the alliance was eventually expanded to other related political engagements and foreign policy alignments over the decades. During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia proved to be a strategic ally in securing US interests, and guarding against communist advances into the region. The importance of Saudi Arabia was further amplified after the Iranian revolution of 1979, and the collapse of the US’s alliance with the Shah.

Continued on page 7
Greetings from Doha.

CIRS has been busy over the past semester working on a number of new and exciting research initiatives. We have produced several academic publications in the form of books, papers, and reports, and have hosted a series of public lectures, inviting members of the Qatar community, and beyond, to engage with experts on the Gulf and Middle East region.

This spring, we initiated and concluded several research projects, and engaged in a number of ongoing and overlapping initiatives, including in-depth studies of “Pluralism and Community in the Middle East,” “Re-envisioning the Arab State,” “Art and Cultural Production in the GCC,” “The Gulf Family,” and “The Geopolitics of Natural Resources in the Middle East.” These intensive research initiatives are designed using empirically-grounded, theoretically informed research where the goal is to fill in existing gaps in the literature and to contribute original knowledge to the field.

Expanding the geographic scope of CIRS research, we launched The Asia Papers series, which is a dedicated forum for engaging with issues of pertinence to Asian nations. The inaugural paper, “Bengal’s Beleaguered Borders: Is there a fix for the Indian Subcontinent’s Transboundary Problems?” is authored by Georgetown University in Qatar’s Robert Wirsing and Samir Kumar Das from the University of Calcutta. In addition, we have continued with publications from our established paper series and Summary Reports in both English and Arabic. As always, our in-house publications can be downloaded for free from the CIRS website. For more information on these recent CIRS publications, please refer to page 3 of this newsletter. This edition of the newsletter contains further detailed information about each CIRS activity and research initiative conducted over the past few months, as well as articles highlighting recent lectures, events, and faculty development initiatives.

We warmly welcome feedback from our readership, whether it is through Facebook, Twitter, or by e-mail. I, and the rest of the CIRS team, look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at our upcoming lectures. We invite our readers to follow CIRS news and activities by logging on to the CIRS website at: http://cirs.georgetown.edu.

Sincerely,

Mehran Kamrava
Professor
Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies
School of Foreign Service in Qatar
Georgetown University
NEW PUBLICATIONS

The Impossibility of Palestine
By Mehran Kamrava, Yale University Press, 2016

The “two-state solution” is the official policy of Israel, the United States, the United Nations, and the Palestinian Authority alike. However, Mehran Kamrava, international relations scholar and Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS), argues that Israel’s “state-building” process has never risen above the level of municipal governance, and its goal has never been Palestinian independence. He explains that a coherent Palestinian state has already been rendered an impossibility, and to move forward, Palestine must redefine its present predicament and future aspirations. Based on detailed fieldwork, exhaustive scholarship, and an in-depth examination of historical sources, this controversial work will be widely read and debated by all sides.

Bengal’s Beleaguered Borders
The Asia Papers no. 1

Professors Robert Wirsing and Samir Kumar Das assess five major transboundary related problems currently troubling the Bengal region and bedeviling, in particular, the relationship between Bangladesh and India. The paper’s focus is on the potential and capacity of the political entities sharing the Bengali region to identify, agree upon, and implement effective and sustainable solutions to these problems. It argues that such solutions, to be sustainable, would have to prioritize cross-border cooperation and mutual benefit—objectives that have thus far neither been aggressively nor consistently pursued in this region. The transboundary problems troubling the Bengal region vary in the extent of their intractability and that some of them will persist far into the future unless resolved.

Bullets and Bulletins: Media and Politics in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings
CIRS Summary Report no. 14

This report contains synopses of chapters published in the CIRS volume on the topic, and offers critical examination into the profound sociopolitical and media transitions that occurred within Arab states in the wake of the uprisings. It explores the intricate ways in which politics and media intersect in their representation and negotiation of political resistance and cultural production in a shifting Arab world. The report provides insights into the changing political dynamics of the region and maps out the rearticulation of power relations between state and society. It adopts a multidisciplinary approach in its analysis of the changing dynamics of media and politics before, during, and in the aftermath of the revolts.

الدول الضعيفة في الشرق الأوسط الكبير
تقرير موجز لمجموعة العمل رقم 11

هذه المبادرة البحثية التي يطلقها مركز الدراسات الدولية والإقليمية، بشأن الدول الضعيفة في منطقة الشرق الأوسط، تبدأ بالتحليل النقدي للتعريفات والمصطلحات المتداولة بشأن الدول الضعيفة والهشة، وت dotyc في الآثار السياسية للخطاب السائد في الشرق الأوسط الكبير. كما يتناول البحث أيضًا الأسباب والعواقب المحلية والإقليمية والعالمية لـ"هشاشة" دول في منطقة الشرق الأوسط، فقد تمت من أفغانستان وباكستان شرقًا إلى ليبيا غربًا. وندرس، عبر توظيف وجهات نظر متعددة التخصصات، الأسباب والأثر المرتبط على مفاهيم هشاشة دول المنطقة فيما يتعلق بإمدادات من قبل السياسة، والأمن، والاقتصاد والوارد الطبيعي، والعلاقات الدولية والداخلية، والهجرة وتقلبات السكان، والاقتصادات السياسية الإقليمية والlopsدلاً نطاقة.
Anatol Lieven, Professor at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, lectured on “Afghanistan: War Without End?” on November 9, 2015. Lieven recounted his experiences as a journalist reporting from Afghanistan in the 1980s, and visiting the country for research in recent years, and offered comparisons between the effects of Soviet military withdrawal in 1989 and the withdrawal of most US troops today. The main difference between the two time periods in Afghan history is that the local government created by the United States is arguably weaker than the one the Soviets left behind, and this is exemplified by the fact that Afghanistan continued as a communist state even after the fall of the USSR. A similarity between the two time periods is continued “overwhelming dependence of the Afghan state on outside help...Around 90 percent of the Afghan state budget and 100 percent of the security budget depends on outside financial aid,” Lieven said.

Around 90 percent of the Afghan state budget and 100 percent of the security budget depends on outside financial aid.

President Obama pledged the complete withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan by the end of his time in office, but there are three major reasons for why this still has not been accomplished. The first obstacle is the rise of the Islamic State in Afghanistan. The establishment of a local branch made up of Afghan and foreign fighters spells further drastic consequences for the US if it ever evacuated the country. The second is the revolt of the Islamic State in Iraq following the US military withdrawal from there, and the near collapse of the Iraqi state. Lieven argued that “the US cannot afford another collapse of a client regime, or an Islamist militant force taking over another large area in the Muslim World.” The third reason for why the US cannot withdraw from the country comes in the form of the Taliban’s resurgent strength and its temporary seizure of Kunduz in September 2015, highlighting the group’s tenacity, and their willingness to fill the impending power vacuum should the US withdraw its military support.

Also disastrous for the future of Afghanistan would be withdrawal of European and US economic aid. Lieven explained that much, if not most, of the international aid money directed towards Afghanistan has been pilfered or squandered, leading Western governments and media to decry the high levels of corruption within Afghanistan, and to call for a halt in future funding. However, Lieven proposed an alternative reading of the situation. He argued that much of the money “redirected” within Afghanistan and by the Afghan government, can be considered a crucial form of state patronage. While this redistribution is illegal—insofar as legality has any meaning in Afghanistan today—it works towards the concentration of wealth and power in Kabul as opposed to its decentralization into the hands of regional warlords, and can be viewed as a better option than depending on profits generated through the enduring heroin industry. The heroin trade is profitable for individual actors, and results in the decentralization of power across groups of actors, including members of the government operating in a non-official capacity, and, of course, the Taliban. In this sense, where the West perceives corrupt practices regarding international aid, the Afghan government perceives a consolidation of the central government’s position, and, thereby, a strengthening of the state.

Adding further complexity to the state of Afghan affairs, Lieven pointed out that much of the current aid money bestowed upon Afghanistan has, in fact, been pilfered and redistributed, albeit “legally,” by the very Western organizations hired to help in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Highlighting a further hypocrisy, he said that the strategy of buying the support of local warlords was the very one devised by the US government upon invading Afghanistan in 2001.

As a final word, Lieven noted that the nature of the Afghan state, as created by the United States, can only function as an extension of US hegemony. The current Afghanistan cannot exist autonomously, and will certainly collapse if the US security scaffolding is removed. “As things stand,” he said, “the most likely future seems to be one of long-term messy warfare between multiple actors” controlling different parts of the country.

Anatol Lieven is a visiting professor in the War Studies Department of King’s College London and a senior fellow of the New America Foundation in Washington DC. His latest book, Pakistan: A Hard Country was published in 2011. From 1986 to 1998, Lieven worked as a British journalist in South Asia and the former Soviet Union, and is author of several books on Russia and its neighbors. From 2000 to 2007 he worked at think tanks in Washington DC.
Zahra Babar Publishes Research on Population and Power in Qatar

While accepting the primacy of economic forces in shaping the regional reliance on foreign labor, in this paper, Zahra Babar, Associate Director for Research at CIRS, suggests that the GCC’s peculiar demography is also reflective of particular political choices made by the states. She examines two particular policymaking tools used widely across the region, namely—the kafala (worker-sponsorship) system and public sector employment of citizens, and assess them within the Qatari context. In Qatar, it appears that these policy tools have been state choices not only to preserve citizens’ economic satisfaction, but also political and social stability.

John Hudak Lectures on “What the U.S. Presidential Election Means for the Middle East”

On February 24, 2016, John Hudak, Senior Fellow and Deputy Director at the Center for Effective Public Management Governance Studies–Brookings Institution, examined “What the U.S. Presidential Election Means for the Middle East.” An expert on U.S. elections and campaigns, Hudak stated that it is difficult to gauge the positions and policies of the U.S. presidential candidates on the Middle East region since they are often vague and variable, especially during the primaries. Compared to previous election cycles, however, the 2016 elections are unique due to the rise of foreign policy as a critical issue for both parties’ candidates. Hudak also discussed the foreign policy credentials of the Republicans and the Democrats, and explored which party has generally seen a change in policy, and foreign policy will remain one of the most vital issues in the first 100-200 days in office. Other important foreign policy issues on the president’s mind will be alleviating the U.S.’s strained relationship with Israel—one area both Democrats and Republicans agree on—and working out the next steps for the nuclear deal with Iran.

“Trees are a lot of serious conflicts in the world where either the U.S. is involved, or there is an expectation for American leadership.”

John Hudak discussed potential areas of foreign policy interests for the next president such as Syria, Israel, and Iran. After taking the presidential oath on January 20, 2017, Syria will be priority for whoever is elected. He stated that either the new president will dramatically change course from Obama’s policies or mildly alter them, depending on whether a Republican or a Democrat emerges victorious. Regardless, Americans can be sure that there will be a change in policy, and foreign policy will remain one of the most vital issues in the first 100-200 days in office. Other important foreign policy issues on the president’s mind will be alleviating the U.S.’s strained relationship with Israel—one area both Democrats and Republicans agree on—and working out the next steps for the nuclear deal with Iran.

Mohamed Zayani, Professor of Critical Theory at Georgetown University in Qatar, and the 2013-2014 CIRS Faculty Fellow, has been awarded the 2016 “Global Communication and Social Change Best Book Award” from the International Communication Association (ICA). Zayani’s Book, Networked Publics and Digital Contention: The Politics of Everyday Life in Tunisia (Oxford University Press, 2015), is part of the Oxford Studies in Digital Politics Series. Zayani will receive his award at the 66th Annual ICA Conference, which will be help in Japan. This book is the first of three CIRS supported book projects on Media and ICT in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.
On November 8 and 9, 2015, the Center of International and Regional Studies (CIRS), in collaboration with Silatech, hosted the second working group meeting as part of their research project on “Youth in the Middle East.” Eight distinguished scholars were invited to provide critical feedback and remarks on the draft papers submitted as part of this project, which covered a wide range of issues faced by youth in the Middle East both domestically and in diaspora. This included themes such as employment, education, religion, political views, gender, fatherhood, economic inclusion, and social cohesion.

For decades, most of the scholarship on youth has been concerned with issues such as human capital, problems and challenges faced by youth, and their contribution to the growth of their respective countries. These concerns have spiked, insofar as the Middle East is concerned, after the wave of uprisings that hit the region in 2011. Numerous social scientists have been addressing youth issues in the transition period post Arab Uprisings; yet, there are still areas that need further in-depth analysis and critical examination.

In collaboration with Silatech, CIRS launched the “Youth in the Middle East” project in 2014. This second working group meeting focused on dynamics and challenges faced by youth in the Middle East. Its aim was to identify gaps in the available literature, suggested areas for further scholarly investigations, and recommend policies to decision-making circles.

The first paper, presented by Samar Farah, examines “The State of Education in the MENA Region and its Implications for Youth.” This paper sheds light on the education system in the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa by exploring data presented in international assessments in recent years. Farah focuses on three levels of analysis—school, teacher, and student levels—in order to better understand the challenges facing the education systems, and their implications on youth living in the region.

Michael Robbins’s paper examines “Youth, Religion, and Democracy after the Arab Uprisings.” Robbins compares the experiences of youth in Egypt and Tunisia—two countries that experienced dramatic changes after the Arab uprisings—by investigating public opinion data gathered by the Arab Barometer Research Project. Robbins addresses the process of political learning among youths, specifically in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia.

Jennifer Olmsted’s paper focuses on “Gender Priorities and the Arab Uprisings.” Olmsted examines gender equality in the transition period after the Arab Uprisings, explores the various transitions that both males and females generally experience, and focuses on various health outcomes as well as questions about political voice. In doing so, Olmsted examines a number of social and economic indicators in order to address broader questions about control of assets and access to services, equal access to schooling, trends of marriage and household formation, and gendered patterns emerging in labor markets.

Natasha Ridge, Soohyun Jeon, Soha Shami, and Ann-Christine Niepelt, presented a paper on “Conceptualizing the Role and Impact of Fathers in the Arab World.” Using data from a pilot study on Arab fathers collected in the United Arab Emirates, the authors explore the role and impact of Arab fathers retrospectively, as reported by adult children, on involvement and self-esteem. They also examine gender, socioeconomic status, and nationality in order to study the influence of father involvement on the experiences of males and females in the Arab world.

Edward Sayre presented paper titled “Youth Economic Inclusion in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings.” This paper examines the influence of the educational levels of individuals and their parents on their ability to secure employment after leaving school. Using both non-parametric (Kaplan Meier) and parametric approaches, this paper assesses the different roles family background plays in the case of women compared to men. It also addresses the issue of inequality of opportunity and its impact on educational achievement and attainment, as well as labor market outcomes. Sayre relies on the 2013 “School to Work Transition Survey” by the International Labor Organization to estimate the determinants of the length of time to find work after leaving school for young Palestinians, specifically those aged between 15 and 29 years old.

Another paper was presented by Samer Kherfi titled “National Employment Policies in the Gulf: Achievements and Challenges.” This paper links the salient features of the GCC labor market to various governmental efforts aimed at nationalizing employment, particularly in the private sector. It also provides an assessment to decades-old policies to boost employment via the direct imposition of minimum quotas for nationals at the firm, industry, and occupation levels. In addition, the paper examines the recent price-based nationalization measures as well as other active labor market interventions.
In light of current turbulent political developments in the Middle East, the accepted historical basis of the US-Saudi relationship has come under questioning, and is in an increasing state of flux. Regional security concerns regarding the rise of sectarian tensions, the machinations of the Islamic State, and the easing of sanctions on Iran, have all worked towards straining the US-Saudi relationship, and are further magnified by domestic Saudi woes in the form of falling oil prices, a weakening economy, rising unemployment, a young population riddled with unrest, and a new royal regime taking an increasingly combative stance in the region.

Hudson mused on how these issues are likely to affect the future of US policy in the Middle East. Since the dangers posed by the Islamic State have become so central to regional and international political discourse, Hudson noted that it is unlikely that the US security umbrella in the Middle East will see any drastic change, and that the United States will continue to see Saudi Arabia as a key ally in its attempts at regional influence. While the solid historical and material interests, business connections, and security contracts between the United States and Saudi Arabia remain largely intact, “there is a rising chorus of hostile analysis and hostile criticism of Saudi Arabia in important political circles in the United States,” that argue in favor of taking a more lenient stance towards Iran, and reversing the balance of regional power. Today, “much of that debate is focused on foreign policy in the Middle East despite President Obama’s wish that he could pivot away from the Middle East and work on Asia instead.” However, Hudson concluded, current policies regarding the special US-Saudi relationship may indeed be altered depending on the results of the upcoming US presidential elections. 

Michael C. Hudson is a former Director of Georgetown University’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS), and from 2010 to 2014 he was the first Director of the Middle East Institute and Professor of Political Science at the National University of Singapore. He was the Kuwait Foundation Visiting Scholar at the Harvard Belfer Center’s Middle East Initiative in spring 2015. Hudson has held Guggenheim, Ford, and Fulbright fellowships and is a past president of the Middle East Studies Association. His publications include The Precarious Republic: Political Modernization in Lebanon; The World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators; Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy; The Palestinians: New Directions; and Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration (editor and contributor). His most recent books are: Gulf Politics and Economics in a Changing World and The Arab Uprisings: Catalysts, Dynamics, and Trajectories.
Karen Exell, Honorary Senior Research Associate at UCL Qatar, and a consultant at Qatar Museums, delivered a CIRS Monthly Dialogue lecture, titled “Museums and Modernity in the Arabian Peninsula,” on Tuesday February 23, 2016. Highlighting some key arguments from her forthcoming book, *Modernity and the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula* (Routledge, 2016), Exell recounted that when she first arrived in Qatar with the task of setting up an institution to cultivate professional museological practices, the general consensus was that no such practices existed in the local context, and that Qatar was a “tabula rasa” in need of such imported knowledge and services. However, after spending time in the country and researching the local museological landscape, she argued that a very different picture emerged.

“Engagement with Western-style museums was and is a strategic choice by the ruling families and elite actors.”

Exell explained that there are two simultaneous and oppositional discourses of cultural production currently being articulated in the region. These are presented as oppositional in terms of both style and content: modern art is seen as a product of Western art history, while traditional cultural practices draw on the oral histories and traditional practices of the region. These binary cultural productions are also presented as providing contrasted cultural experiences: one evokes an internationally-recognized art world, while the other invites a dialogic and immersive interaction with traditional regional productions. In order to examine how these discourses have been put into practice, Exell compared the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar with the Saif Marzooq Al-Shamlan and Bait Al Outhman museums in Kuwait.

“The Museum of Islamic Art draws extensively on the Western paradigm of museological expertise,” she said, and is a prestige project that attempts to create a new global cultural center within Qatar. Such “engagement with Western-style museums was and is a strategic choice by the ruling families and elite actors,” and has been geared towards realizing a multitude of agendas over the years. Following independence, museological practices aided in nation-building, creation of consistent historical narratives, and legitimizing the status of the region’s ruling families. In the contemporary period, they are “a means of branding nations and gaining symbolic global power through accessing cultural capital,” she noted.

The Saif Marzooq Al-Shamlan and Bait Al Outhman museums in Kuwait, meanwhile, represent centers for the protection of local histories and traditional knowledge. Since these cultural forms are “rich in the kind of heritage that orthodox Western heritage models struggle to accommodate: intangible, performative, and embodied,” they are hard to promote, or export. Simply put, they do not fit within the Western museological paradigm. However, Exell argued, while these local museological practices are deemed of little international value, they are of extreme importance in supporting and creating national identities and narratives.

It is by examining the rhetoric surrounding these supposedly contrasting cultural spheres that one can begin to understand how the two discourses actually play towards specific and strategic regional agendas, she said. As the Gulf states attempt to exploit the immense wealth created through hydrocarbon industries, these nations must also answer to how they are protecting against the encroachment of rapid regional transformations. Even as certain elements of modernity are being celebrated, there is a simultaneous call to strengthen local heritage as defense against what is perceived to be an onslaught and effacement of local histories and cultures. This balancing act between the old and the new is exemplified in the two types of cultural engagements practiced in the region.

Ultimately, Exell argued, “the rhetoric of fusing the traditional and the modern represents the region’s approach to modernity… an agenda of retaining cultural identity in balance with aspects of a more secular modernity, while the rhetoric of engagement with global art and ideas of the universal is a method of discursively bridging cultures—bridging the East and the West and bringing people together—is repeatedly emphasized by actors investing in and producing the global art projects.”

Karen Exell directed the MA in Museum and Gallery Practice at UCL Qatar from 2011–2015, after teaching museums studies and holding curatorial positions in university museums in the UK for several years. She is currently involved in two QNRF-funded research projects, as a PI on project researching museum pedagogy in Qatar and the region, and as LPI on project exploring the concept of national identity in relation to the planned new National Museum of Qatar. Her recent publications include the co-edited volumes, *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices* (Ashgate, 2014), and *Museums in Arabia: Transnational Practices and Regional Processes* (Ashgate, 2016).
Reem Al-Ansari is a professor at Qatar University’s College of Law and the 2015–2016 CIRS Qatar University Fellow at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. She delivered a CIRS Monthly Dialogue on March 23, 2016, on the topic “Is Black Money Really Black? The International and National Fight Against Money Laundering.” The talk focused on the billions of dollars criminals launder through the global financial system, the staggering social, economic, and political fallout they cause, and what countries like Qatar are doing in response.

Beginning her lecture by defining the term “money laundering,” Al-Ansari said that: “In its simplest form, money laundering refers to an amount of money leaving from destination A, and using techniques to make it seem like the funds were obtained from destination B, a legal source.” Once the money has moved through several banks in different countries, it can then be returned to its owner, ready to be used as legitimate funds.

Al-Ansari, who is also the Director of the Legal Research and Studies division at Role of Law and Anti-Corruption Center (ROLACC) in Doha, Qatar, listed the various countries targeted for money laundering, as well as the nations that serve as destinations for newly cleaned money. Adding that Qatar is also a target of this criminal activity, she said that Qatari authorities have taken steps to respond to the threat of money laundering by introducing a specific law to mitigate against it. This comprehensive law was enacted following the unsatisfactory conclusion of an IMF-led evaluation report of Qatar’s banking system. “Qatar is awakening to the threat, and it led to the new law,” she said.

The newly established regulations are particularly important as a result of the criminal opportunities posed by the upcoming FIFA World Cup in 2022, she said. Further strengthening Qatar’s anti-corruption commitment, she added that, “Qatar now adheres to the series of recommendations that FATF has developed and that set the international standard for combating of money laundering,” referring to the nation’s membership to the Financial Action Task Force, an intergovernmental policy-making body, established in 1989 to promote effective implementation of measures for combating threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

The consequences of unchecked money laundering, she concluded, are severe, including increased criminal activity and currency inflation in developing economies, which bear the consequences of economic collapse when critical funds simply disappear as they continue through the multi-step money cleaning process.

Reem Al-Ansari received her LLM from the University of Michigan Law School–Ann Arbor, and earned her Doctorate degree from Georgetown University’s Law Center in Washington D.C., marking her as the youngest Qatari lawyer and doctorate degree holder in the state. In addition to lecturing, Al-Ansari is the Director of the Legal Research and Studies division at Role of Law and Anti-Corruption Center (ROLACC) in Doha, Qatar.

Reem Al-Ansari worked at the World Bank headquarters in the Governance and Anti-corruption (GAC) unit, and is the recipient of two EED awards for education excellence. She is currently working on a book tackling the issue of money laundering and corruption, and tweets under @ReemaAlAnsari.
On November 15 and 16, 2015, CIRS hosted the second working group meeting under its research initiative on “the Gulf Family.” Ten experts—five of whom are CIRS grant-awardees who have carried out fieldwork—presented papers that covered a wide range of issues related to the family in the Arab states of the Gulf. Papers presented and discussed a variety of topics, including tribalism and the family; the marriage institution; cross-national or “mixed” marriages; social stratification and the family; family law and the rights of the child; sexuality and the family; the impact of war on Iraqi families; gender relations; power and politics; and bilingualism, among other areas of research.

The family has historically been an integral unit of society, and its structure and formation are continuously adapting to evolving social, economic, and political developments. Many GCC states have witnessed massive transformation since the discovery of oil, having emerged over the past few decades as strategically important and modern states. This transformation across the region brought with it changes to the nature and functions of the state that were paralleled with equally rapid changes in society, culture, and economy. The Gulf family has been influenced by these broader social dynamics, but academic scholarship on the topic remains limited and the family in the Arabian Peninsula remains largely understudied.

CIRS’s research initiative supports original research that explores questions related to the family institution in the Gulf, including those that focus on family structure, demographic dynamics, the role and impact of policies, tribes, kinship ties, customs, and values. CIRS awarded five competitive grants to scholars proposing original fieldwork on the topic. Building on the first working group meeting, the scholars presented papers and core research findings. During this meeting, the participants engaged in critical discussions of each paper, providing comments and feedback on the various contributions.

Examples of some of the papers discussed during the two-day meeting included one on “Tribalism and Family Affairs,” which examines the tribal character of Gulf families, focusing on the influence of tribalism in the conduct of family affairs. The paper investigates whether or not current social and cultural practices of families from the region can be classified as “tribal.” Since there is debate over the notion and meaning of “tribalism” in existing literature, this study begins by introducing a framework and definition of what tribal values actually are, and how these have impacted the pre-oil and post-oil dynamics of the Gulf family.

Another paper “the Soaring Bride-Price (mabr) in a Context of Modernization: A Complex Variable that is Affecting the Formation of the Gulf Family: The Case of Oman,” was the result of a CIRS grant in which original research was carried out on fundamental questions regarding how the mabr amount is determined and negotiated in Oman, and how this is impacting trends in marriages in the Sultanate. This study provides a nuanced understanding of patriarchal family structures, state regulations, notions of masculinity and femininity, and how the family, as a unit, continues to influence the marriage institution in Oman as well as other states.

Other topics under discussion included mixed marriages among Qataris; social stratification in the Qatari society; Gulf family law; the state of sexuality in the Gulf family; war families and the Iraq wars; Yemeni women activists; power and family structures; and bilingual children of the Gulf states.

Zahra Babar, Associate Director for Research at CIRS, concluded the working group meeting by highlighting the participants’ contributions to scholarship through their papers, which will be published by CIRS in an edited volume collected over the next few months.

This working group is part of CIRS Scholarship’s initiatives that aim to fill in existing research gaps, and contribute towards furthering knowledge. Each of these initiatives involves some of the most prominent scholars of the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region who address prevailing issues related to the security, economic stability, and political realm of the region.
SHANTAYANAN DEVARAJAN LECTURES ON “HOW THE ARAB WORLD CAN BENEFIT FROM LOW OIL PRICES”

Shantayanan Devarajan, Chief Economist of the World Bank’s Middle East and North Africa Region, lectured on “How the Arab World Can Benefit from Low Oil Prices” on March 24, 2016, in which he proposed that the widespread concern about plummeting oil prices, particularly among rentier states, is not a predicament to be solved, but an opportunity to be harnessed.

Devarajan highlighted four key problems facing the Arab world today. The first of these is that the region has the highest unemployment rates in the developing world, a figure that reflects the systematic exclusion of women and young people from the labor market. The second problem is the lack of economic diversification and, especially in the case of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, concentration on the exports of a single commodity, whether oil or gas. Made more visible by the events of the Arab uprisings, the third problem includes the poor quality of public services, such as the widespread lack of sustained electricity and sanitation in many Arab countries. The final problem concerns the high volatility of already declining average growth rates for countries such as Egypt.

“There is no reason to have 95 percent of the labor force in the civil service... There is not that much work to be done in the public sector to have so many people employed.”

All of these issues, he argued, are intimately connected with the prevalent policies decision-makers have implemented across the Arab world in recent times. Devarajan identified and discussed three key adverse policies. The first concerns a variety of policies that have led to the non-optimal use of public resources, whether deliberately or inadvertently. The second adverse policy involves the high proportion of civil servants in the labor force, making the ratio of public to private sector workers in the MENA region the highest in the world. In Kuwait, for instance, 95 percent of the male labor force works in the public sector. Exemplifying the high levels of volatility in the region, the third policy underscores the pro-cyclical strategies that allow countries to enter into an expansionary mode when oil prices are up, often with the risk of debt, and contraction when prices drop.

Devarajan emphasized the connection between poor policymaking initiatives and the four major problems facing the Arab world. As an example, he examined the impact of fuel subsidies on energy-intensive industries, arguing that the persistent subsidizing of these large, old, and capital intensive firms hinders these small firms from growing, ultimately affecting the labor market and precluding employment growth. Young and small firms, on the other hand, which do create jobs through growth and expansion, are associated with non-energy-intensive firms. Thus, unemployment in many Arab countries can be partially, but not exclusively, attributed to energy subsidies. Similarly, the policy of Arab countries maintaining a large civil service has the effect of crowding out the private sector. The relatively more stable working conditions for those employed in the public sector, in both oil importing and exporting countries, discourages nationals from working in the private sector, thus limiting overall economic growth.

These examples constitute the “bad news.” However, the “good news” has been taking shape since the price of oil fell in 2014-15 when the region began witnessing remarkable systematic investments in energy subsidy reforms by oil importers and exporters alike. “The UAE, basically, has eliminated its fuel subsidies,” Kuwait, Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt have followed suit, and “Lebanon has addressed its water subsidies,” leading to a positive environment of policy reform. In the civil service sector of many Arab countries, partial reforms are being undertaken, where governments are cutting back on civil service wages, benefits, and wasteful expenditures. Underpublicized are also efforts by some of these countries to improve energy efficiency, including investing in renewables. Owing to recent subsidy reforms, and by association, the drop in oil prices, oil-dependent countries are unexpectedly moving towards renewables, even faster than some European countries, thus making a larger contribution to the mitigation of global climate change.

In contrast to times of stability, therefore, low oil prices allow for the formation of political coalitions necessary to pursue a variety of political and economic reforms. The reason for these changes, Devarajan explained, is budgetary pressure. “There is no reason to have 95 percent of the labor force in the civil service. There are not that many jobs. There is not that much work to be done in the public sector to have so many people employed,” he argued. Devarajan concluded by sharing his optimism for further positive change in a low oil-price Arab world due to already demonstrated possibilities for reform.

Shantayanan Devarajan was the director of the World Development Report 2004, Making Services Work for Poor People. Before 1991, he was on the faculty of Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. Devarajan’s research covers public economics, trade policy, natural resources and the environment, and general equilibrium modeling of developing countries. Devarajan received his B.A. in mathematics from Princeton University and his Ph.D. in economics from the University of California, Berkeley.
Uday Chandra Discusses New Book at CIRS Faculty Research Workshop

On March 28, 2016, CIRS hosted a Faculty Research Workshop on Uday Chandra’s book manuscript Negotiating Leviathan: State and Tribe in Modern India. The book explores how and why certain people and places came to be seen as “tribal” in modern India, and in turn, how “tribal” subjects remade their customs and communities in the course of negotiations with colonial and postcolonial states.

Chandra argues that the state and tribes make and remake each other recursively in the margins of modern India, historical processes of modern statemaking shaping and being shaped by myriad forms of resistance by tribal subjects. Implicit here is a critique of theories of “subaltern” resistance that treat tribes and peasants as vestiges of a pre-modern past and at odds with the workings of modern states. Comparatively speaking, the manuscript carries much relevance beyond South Asia, especially in the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, where “tribes” continue to be politically salient yet widely misunderstood as pre-modern vestiges.

Research for this book, which comes out of Chandra’s doctoral project, was conducted over the past decade. Archival research in London, Delhi, Kolkata, Patna, Pune, Bangalore, and Ranchi permitted Chandra to piece together a history of the modern Indian state in its “tribal” margins over the past two centuries. These archives, far from being mere repositories of the state’s own perceptions of tribal communities, presented a polyphonic chorus of voices, ranging from paternalistic British and Indian officials and Christian missionaries seeking converts to tribal subjects from diverse backgrounds speaking in different tongues. In-depth ethnographic research over three years in the forests of central Jharkhand, he listened to their songs, stories, and histories, and observed the ways in which their ways of life were enmeshed with those of the state. Indeed, even the Maoist movement, which was spreading across the region, coexisted curiously with the state, and ordinary men and women lived under circumstances of dual sovereignty.

The participants included historians, political scientists, anthropologists, and sociologists specializing in the study of modern India. They suggested vital changes to the manuscript in order to avoid certain pitfalls and to appeal broadly to its intended audiences. Firstly, they recommended rewriting the introductory chapter entirely for a general audience unfamiliar with the subject matter of the book. The introduction, they explained, should reflect the core strengths of the book, namely, the author’s interdisciplinary approach and deep familiarity with his fieldsites and their inhabitants. Secondly, some participants suggested laying out clearly at the outset how the data were collected, especially during ethnographic fieldwork, and rendering the author more visible in the book’s narrative. Doing so, they claimed, would permit readers to appreciate the uniqueness of the research and the author’s close relationships with informants, both of which are implicit rather than explicit at present.

Thirdly, other participants argued for a closer braiding together of the historical and ethnographic parts of the manuscript. Each chapter could, of course, make its own arguments, but to the extent that the author argues that the past matters for the present, they need to be brought into close conversation with each other across chapters. Lastly, a number of workshop participants advised the author to clearly define key terms such as the “state,” “resistance,” and “negotiation” so that readers are certain of how they are being deployed in the book. The author thanked the workshop participants for these suggestions, which, he said, will greatly improve the overall quality of the manuscript.

Uday Chandra received his B.A. in economics from Grinnell College and his PhD in political science from Yale University in 2013. He received the 2013 Sardar Patel Award for writing the best dissertation in a US university on any aspect of modern South Asia. He held a research fellowship at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Goettingen, Germany. Uday’s work has been published in the Law & Society Review, Social Movement Studies, New Political Science, The Journal of Contemporary Asia, Contemporary South Asia, and the Indian Economic & Social History Review. He has coedited volumes and journal special issues on the ethics of self-making in modern South Asia, subaltern politics and the state in contemporary India, caste relations in colonial and postcolonial eastern India, and social movements in rural India today.
CIRS convened the first working group meeting under its new research initiative, “Re-Envisioning the Arab State,” on January 17-18, 2016. The working group brought together scholars and experts representing a variety of disciplines including political geography, sociology, history, and political science. The purpose of the meeting was to identify central research questions on the evolving role of the Arab states in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. The participants discussed a variety of topics ranging from the definition, conception, and evolution of the Arab state, the state’s functions and institutions, as well as key topics such as state sovereignty, legitimacy, capacity, state-society relations, political engagement, and civil-military relations across the Arab world.

The meeting began with a discussion of the conception and definition of the “Arab state.” The 2011 revolts as well as the subsequent disintegration of several Arab states have reinvigorated scholarly interest in the most fundamental questions around statehood in the Middle East. Since 2011, several states in the region have experienced social and political turmoil (Egypt and Lebanon) while others have rapidly disintegrated into “failed” or “failing” states (Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya). During the working group, participants debated the validity of the very classification of the “Arab state,” and highlighted the need for further exploring what constitutes a state as being Arab. There is a general assumption that an Arab state is where the majority of the population identifies as being Arab and speaking Arabic.

At the same time, there is something more nuanced when theorizing the validity of the Arab state as a distinct sub-category that needs to move beyond ethno-linguistic conceptions and boundaries. The participants discussed the issue of legitimacy within the Arab state, and suggested that determining or measuring state legitimacy is also not always clearly defined by scholars. There was discussion over whether it is the state itself that provided legitimacy through its domestic arena, through its society and citizenry, or was it a result of the confirmation of legitimacy provided by the international community and the international order. Participants stressed the role of foreign powers when discussing the Arab state, given the pivotal role played by external actors during processes of state formation in the Middle East in the last century, and because so many outside powers still continue to exert their influence.

At the current juncture, with increasing conflict and war, the political map of the region may potentially be redrawn in ways yet unknown. Boundaries established by the colonial powers have remained remarkably durable since the evolution of the post-colonial arrangements in the Middle East. Notwithstanding this, enthusiastic cartographers and Middle East experts have often taken to producing imaginative re-drawings of the Middle East, seeking to illustrate how the region could look if “properly” demarcated based on history, ethnicity, and linguistic affiliation. Yet these highly creative versions of the territorial construction of the Middle East may not appear so far-fetched or fantastical in the current context. With the rise of ISIS and its incursion onto the territory of two fragile Arab states, understanding the durability of borders and territory, as well as their meaning to the citizens, has once again become important. Working Group participants considered the reconfiguration of borders within the Arab world and the politics around sovereignty and space.

Additionally, the post-2011 environment has exposed the fundamental weakness of institutions within the Arab. The failure of the states to deliver essential public services and good to their citizens has been compounded by limitations on political freedom expression, inadequate economic security, and corrupt and inept state institutions. As a consequence, extremist movements like ISIS have stepped into the picture with promises of providing order, stability, peace, and security to the people. Members of the Working Group noted that most Islamic oppositional forces arrayed against regimes do not want to abolish the state system; instead, they are seeking to either control the state or present an alternative, Islamic model of political rule.

While the participants addressed a multitude of topics ranging from the conception, functions, and institutions of the Arab state to the basic challenges to its legitimacy and sovereignty after the 2011 uprisings, they all acknowledged that there are gaps in the existing literature where more research is required. Hence, the Working Group concluded by identifying areas of research where further analysis is needed. These included the conception and terminology surrounding the very notion of the Arab state, the position and application of political boundaries, ideologies and discourses of the state, engagement between state and the citizens, and the perseverance or change of prevailing ruling bargains particularly in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings.
On February 7, 2016, CIRS held its second working group meeting on “Art and Cultural Production in the GCC.” Project participants, as well as other scholars, engaged in critical group discussions, and provided feedback to the authors on their draft chapters. The chapters written for this project address a variety of subjects, including amongst other topics: utopian ideals and art museums in the Arabian Peninsula; public art in Gulf cities; aesthetics, artistic production, and censorship in the GCC; art as modernity and “soft power,” and art and discourses of culture and “authenticity” in the UAE.

The economies of Gulf states have experienced immense growth. This has influenced the political significance of these states on the international and regional levels, and the social fabric of these states, due to the influx of expats from all around the world, on the domestic level. The pace of changes in the social fabric of these states has influenced the development of artistic and cultural institutions. The limited existing scholarship tends to focus on the rapidly growing museum culture and the acquisition of foreign art as indicative of several Gulf states’ use of oil revenue. This project builds on available literature by contributing towards furthering knowledge on the prevailing issues around art and cultural production in the Gulf. The contributed chapters explore the process of art acquisition and certain GCC governments’ investment in museums and artworks, and investigate the effects of art importation and assimilation on citizens’ perceptions of identity and self.

The working group commenced with Karen Exell’s chapter on “Utopian Ideals, Unknowable Futures, and the Art Museum in the Arabian Peninsula.” Exell explores the idea of the utopian in relation to art museums and the contemporary moment in the Arabian Peninsula. The second chapter was presented by Nadia Mounajjed on “Public Art in Gulf Cities.” Mounajjed claims that although “public art” refers to artworks, either permanent or temporary, commissioned for sites with open public access, in the Gulf it is only discussed in the context of architectural production and urban design. In the third presented chapter titled: “Of ‘Gray Lists’ and Whitewash: The Aesthetics and Artistic Strategies of Complicity and Circumvention in the GCC,” Nancy Demerdash examines the GCC’s “gray areas” in artistic censorship. She claims that the processes by which works receive endorsement and acceptance, or scrutiny and rejection, by a combination of private sponsors, patrons, or the public, presents a complex fabric of actors beyond the state apparatus, extending to institutions and organizations.

Lesley Gray presented “Contemporary Art as Modernity: Art and Global Identity in Azerbaijan and the Gulf.” Using textual and media discourse analysis for both academic and popular media, Gray examines the factors that were instrumental in the rise of contemporary art as part of a strategy of international engagement, and contextualizes this information with the opinions of those who work in the art scene in Baku. Moreover, within the context of other similar geographies in the Arabian Peninsula who share Azerbaijan’s energy wealth, Azerbaijani modernity is one that has incorporated elements of Western-style economic progress propelled by oil wealth without the accompanying personal, social, and political freedoms and rights. Specifically, this chapter asks how can we define Azerbaijani modernity, and under what conditions has it arisen? How has the media shaped the image of Azerbaijan to an international audience? How has contemporary art developed in the post-Soviet era and how does it express Azerbaijan’s modern identity to the international art community? What does the contemporary art scene look like from the ground up and who is their public? And how does Azerbaijan, and specifically Baku, compare to other similar cities like Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Dubai?

In the final chapter on “Authentic Culture in the UAE,” Elizabeth Derderian argues that the “museum boom” in the Gulf region raises questions of authenticity and cultural appropriation. Focusing largely on the United Arab Emirates (UAE), this chapter explores the concept of authenticity and how its deployment affects exclusion in particular ways. Derderian examines the ways in which authenticity claims create the need for experts and serve as forms of knowledge production that rely on and reproduce different structures and dynamics of power. In addition, Derderian parses cultural exchange from cultural appropriation, focusing on hierarchies of power and exclusion. Together, these papers will be published as a special issue of the Journal of Arabian Studies in the coming year.
Translation and the Cultural Revolution in Early Republican Turkey

Firat Oruc, Assistant Professor of English and Humanities at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar and the 2015-2016 CIRS-SFSQ Faculty Fellow, delivered a CIRS Focused Discussion on February 3, 2016. The lecture drew on central themes from Oruc’s current book project examining the cultural and ideological transformations forged during the early decades of the ‘Turkish Republic, with particular emphasis on importation and translation of classics in world literature.

With the forming of the new Turkish Republic, a new Turkish identity was crafted on the principles of nationalism, modernity, and secularism. “In order to create a new society and country out of the now gone Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his comrades envisioned ‘a total revolution’ in all aspects possible,” and especially in language reform, replacing Arabic script with Latin script. For the reformers, “translation from European languages would enable Turkish to ‘free’ itself from the historical ‘yoke’ of Arabic and Persian words, idioms, and expressions.”

Answering questions such as: “Why would a state need world literature?” and “What was this ‘foreign element’ doing in the midst of the ‘Turkish cultural revolution?’” Oruc explained that the Kemalist state saw reading as means of cultivating “civilized” citizens with a crusade against “ignorance” based on reason and knowledge. The European humanist canon was taken as the philosophical basis for the republican reforms that would lead to a “Turkish renaissance.” This “cultural engineering” and the creation of a new national canon relied on a campaign of translation in which the state was the central actor. “Thus, an organized, and government administered operation of translation contributed to the state regulation of language,” Oruc argued. However, this celebration of a cultural revolution was not supported by a corresponding implementation of a social revolution, and many in Turkish society remained illiterate and impoverished, and incapable of partaking in the grand visions presented by the elite.

In conclusion, Oruc pondered the question of the complex tensions and contradictions involved in the formation of world literature in non-western societies such as Turkey. He argued that, even though the study of world literature purports to be a global humanist project, the grand narratives of the discipline have been largely shaped by specific European histories and ideologies. In order to problematize the power relations enacted through the world literature discourse, Oruc proposed engaging with the perspective of other nodes in the global network. “The state has so far never been discussed as an actor in the field of world literature. Whereas, in the Turkish case, the state is right at the center,” where world literature was coopted as an ideological apparatus.

Firat Oruc received his Ph.D. in Literature from Duke University in 2010. His teaching specialties include contemporary global literature, 20th century Anglophone writing, literatures of the Middle East, and world cinema. Before joining SFS-Q, he taught in the Comparative Literary Studies program at Northwestern University (2011-2013) and the departments of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles (2010-2011).

"Youth in the Middle East Working” Group Meeting II
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The last paper delivered at the working group meeting was presented by Sherine El-Taraboulsi and was titled “Navigating British-ness: British-Libyan youth, the Arab unrest and debates on immigration in the United Kingdom.” This paper investigates the discourse on immigration in the United Kingdom, and its implications on the sense of belonging of British-Libyan youth, especially at a time of social and political upheaval in the Arab world. In exploring this issue, El-Taraboulsi unpacks topics related to faith, ethnicity, and citizenship of Libyan youth in diaspora.

The meeting was concluded by Mehran Kamrava, Director of CIRS, and Paul Dyre, Senior Consultant at Silatech. As part of a collaborative effort between the two institutions and through facilitating original contributions to the topic by experts, the Working Group moved the study of youth in the contemporary Middle East further along. CIRS and Silatech expect to publish the products of this research initiative in the near future.

This working group is part of CIRS’s Scholarship’s initiatives that aim to fill in existing research gaps, and contribute towards furthering knowledge. Each of these initiatives involves some of the most prominent scholars of the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region who address prevailing issues related to the security, economic stability, and political realm of the region.
"Pluralism and Community in the Middle East" Working Group Meeting I

CIRS held a working group on March 6-7, 2016 in which a number of distinguished scholars discussed issues related to ethno-linguistic and religious pluralism in the Middle East, identified gaps in the existing literature, and pointed to potential areas of original research. Amongst the various topics discussed, participants examined pluralism and diversity as represented through governance and legal regimes; social inclusion/exclusion and policymaking; the role and symbolism of iconoclasm in the Middle East; architecture, the urban space, and identity; digital culture, political communication and regional notions of “multiculturalism,” language, and literature and cultural representation. Two specific case studies, the Amazighs and Armenian Christians, were also discussed.

The Middle East’s pluralistic social and political fabric has gone through several historical changes, and ethnicity, religion, language, and political ideologies play pivotal roles in contemporary identity affiliations across the region. National and regional conflicts often intensify subnational identities, and this has especially been the case in the Middle East over the past several years. Participants identified a series of original areas of research regarding the ongoing intensification of identities in the Middle East, including the relationship between the conceptions of the state and inclusion of some identity groups and the exclusion of others; the impact of globalization and transnational communities; the historical legacy of the Ottoman millet system; sectarianism in the post-Arab Spring era; the role of intellectuals and social media in identity formation; and the underlying causes and consequences of increasing religiosity.

Governance and state policies impact the social, economic, and political inclusion or exclusion of communities in the Middle East. Participants discussed the multiple linkages between statehood and identity-formation in the Middle East. They questioned the relationship between communities and sites of power; and challenges international law’s values and principles pose on states’ traditional governance. The participants also discussed topics related to the parallel development of local human rights traditions along with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a sort of self-determination in the decision-making processes, and the role of state institutions in enforcing social harmonization and cohesiveness.

State policies dealing with education, families, kinship and law, mobility of labor and capital can directly impact social inclusion and exclusion. State policies have greatly impacted foreign, national, and private educational institutions. Although this is not unique to the Middle East, there is limited literature on the notions of inclusion and exclusion in educational curriculums. The relationship between policymaking and ways in which families are being constructed also has direct bearing on education. The nature of communities’ relations both with each other and the state could be seen as a result of exclusionary and inclusionary policies. In addition, the participants discussed issues related to mobility of people and ideas, social representation in the education system, globalization, the war on terror, and school curricula in the Middle East.

Modern nation-building processes began roughly in the middle of the twentieth century in several states of the Middle East, such as Egypt and Iraq. Driven by ideology, politics and religious beliefs, states, and recently non-state actors like ISIS, have used iconoclasm as a tool to limit the multiple identities within the nation state, and reinforce a monolithic identity. The practice of iconoclasm has impacted the material culture and visual heritage of the different religious and ethno-linguistic communities that comprise the region’s demography. Archeological negligence, and inconsiderate urban planning have also contributed to this erasure of visual pluralism. In addition, participants also discussed the role of social media and film in encouraging and countering iconoclasm in the Middle East.

Urban spaces have been going through swift progression in some countries, and massive urban decay in others. Master planning of urban spaces is very politicized in the Middle East, with various socio-economic drivers and consequences. The planning of gated and smart cities, and new capitals segregates communities by nationality, class, ethnicity, and religion. The participants posed questions related to the definition of public good, social representation in master planning, public contestation, access to public information, democratic decentralization, communities’ quarters, gentrification of communities, security, citizenship, and urban equality and inequality.

Media is a tool of communication greatly influenced by states in the Middle East. It propagates certain convictions insofar as religious and ethno-linguistic communities in the Middle East are concerned. Participants identified four topics that are insufficiently researched: labor and digital media; citizenship; border; and knowledge production. Within these four main topics, questions around the usage of media by migrant workers and expatriates in the Gulf, redesigning of borders, under-representation in political and media institutions, capitalism and cognitive knowledge, memory preservation, and production of knowledge were identified as important areas of original research.
My research interests cover areas in theoretical and applied linguistics. My theoretical linguistics work investigates language as a cognitive phenomenon distinct to humans. This line of research falls within the field of cognitive science. One of the primary goals of this line of research is to uncover the mental representations of the human language faculty. The language faculty is one of the wonders of the human mind and studying it gives us a window into the workings and design of the human mind. This language faculty enables children to master a sophisticated linguistic system long before they enter into the formal operational stage. I bring data from the different Arabic varieties and look for patterns of grammar that bear on cross-linguistic phenomena related to the design of the human language faculty. This type of research also has applications to language acquisition. A better understanding of linguistic patterns as a product of the language faculty has direct implications and applications to first and second language acquisition whatever or not formal instruction of language takes place.

My fascination with language started with early childhood education in school through the introduction of Arabic grammar as an essential component of the Arabic language curriculum. It was then that I found out about the intricate and sophisticated system of Arabic grammar—a grammar that is the product of a rich and great linguistic tradition in medieval times. My fascination with language grew with my decision to study English linguistics at Yarmouk University in Jordan where I earned a B.A. and an M.A. in English. I also studied French at Yarmouk and one of the surprising facts then was discovering that French, not English, shares interesting similarities with my Arabic dialect. In addition to the rich morphological system whereby the gender and number of adjectives and verbs match that of the noun, I found it very interesting that two negation particles are used for negation—one particle precedes the verb and the other follows it.

But studying English and French did not diminish my passion for Arabic linguistics. On the contrary, studying English grew my passion for modern linguistics—a field of study that is comparative in nature. Modern linguistic theories such as generative linguistics, otherwise known as Chomskyan linguistics, aims at characterizing the human language faculty by investigating and comparing the different linguistic patterns found in different languages.

Right after finishing my M.A at Yarmouk University I received a Fulbright scholarship to study and teach in the US at Drury University. A year after that, my dream of studying modern linguistics came true. I started a Ph.D. program at Indiana university-Bloomington. Indiana University has one of the top tier and oldest programs in general linguistics in North America. I spent five years studying and teaching (Arabic) linguistics.

Not surprisingly, my Ph.D. research started with the very same topic that I found most interesting when I was learning French in Jordan. It was negation. I wrote my dissertation on this very interesting aspect of human language—the ability to deny a proposition. It may not come as a given, but it is language that gives us the power to say that something does not exist, or is not true! My focus in the dissertation was on Levantine Arabic. Since then, I developed this topic by writing on the other Arabic varieties. I have published about this topic in the prestigious journal Lingua and in reputable Arabic linguistics publication venues. I am still working on this topic and it is a major research project that is expanding into other syntactic categories such as Tense, Mood, and Modality. Another research project I currently have investigates the interface between the syntactic structure (sentence structure) and the morphological structure (word structure). I also have a third project investigating the acquisition of Arabic by Arabs in the US and the Arab world.

Over the years, I taught Arabic language and linguistics courses at various US and Jordanian universities such as Yarmouk University, University of Jordan, Drury University, Indiana University, and Earlham College. Teaching at these different schools has significantly contributed to the development of my teaching style and philosophy. I believe that the primary goal of teaching is to equip the students with the skills for success at the professional and personal levels. Knowledge, in my view, is the medium for developing these skills. I, thus, structure my classes around four main skills that I want the students to develop. These skills are analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, and presentation. The structure of the classes and assignments is built to maximize the students’ opportunity to develop these skills.

The knowledge that is involved in my classes at Georgetown University in Qatar is, not surprisingly, related to my research interests and the students’ interests in the variation in Arabic grammar, the interactions between Arabic and society, the interaction between Arabic and language policies/politics, and finally Arabic language and the political discourse.
Mehran Kamrava Discusses “The Impossibility of Palestine”

Mehran Kamrava, Professor and Director of CIRS, discussed the findings of his most recent book, *The Impossibility of Palestine: History, Geography and the Road Ahead* (Yale University Press, 2016), on April 5, 2016. Explaining why he felt the need to write this book, Kamrava said that what he had learnt about Palestine as a student and professor of the Middle East bore little resemblance to the reality of what he experienced when he began conducting fieldwork in Palestine. He recalled this disconnect by noting, “I was immediately struck, while I was on the ground, by the inconsistency between my own assumptions—what I had studied and what I had thought about over the years—and the reality on the ground.” Kamrava argued that Oslo Accords, an exciting development in the stalemate of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, offered little to alleviate the struggle of Palestinians and lead to further entrenchment of the continued struggle raging on the ground. Kamrava explained: “If you think about Palestinian history, Palestinian society, and Palestinian politics, a Palestinian state is impossible. The realities on the ground as they have unfolded have made a Palestinian state impossible and improbable.” However, “a Palestinian nation, or, more specifically, a Palestinian national identity will continue to live on and will be extremely vibrant. In fact, the vibrancy of Palestinian identity—of what it is to be Palestinian lies largely because of the impossibility of the Palestinian state.”

Kamrava adumbrated three complicated reasons that have made a Palestinian state impossible. The first of these is a result of the complex political forces that have shaped Palestinian history and continue to dictate its current predicament and future direction. Within this category, Kamrava examined four subsets of these political dynamics, including Israel’s military and territorial conquest and defeat of an ill-equipped Palestine in 1948; the subsequent decades of Israel’s ethnic cleansing of Palestinians through outright violence as well as through “legal” administrative policies resulting in the stealthy “silent transfer” of Palestinian communities from their historical homelands; the systematic defeat of Palestinian armed struggle taken up since the 1970s; and, finally, the international community’s betrayal of the Palestinian leadership in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords.

The second reason for the impossibility of Palestine, Kamrava explained, is due to the debilitating geographic segregations introduced after the Oslo Accords. Palestinian mobility became increasingly restricted with the division of the West Bank into three separate territories: Area A, under Palestinian control; Area B, under Israeli military control and Palestinian civil and administrative control; and Area C, under complete Israeli control. “This,” he said, “is result of the Oslo Accords. This is the Palestine that the Palestinian leadership agreed to.” These political dynamics conspired to divide Palestinian territories into a series of dysfunctional and ungovernable entities, thus disempowering Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and undermining any notion of a future Palestinian state.

The third, and most consequential, reason for the impossibility of a Palestinian state is the critical changes that have been taking place in Palestinian society, and the multiple factions therein. Despite their eagerness to offer assistance, civil society organizations have, in many ways, hampered the constitution of a Palestinian state. While these organizations have often been supportive, they are, ultimately, beholden to their foreign funders, who then dictate where support can be given and where it should be withheld. Many of these decisions have been politically motivated, seriously curtailing the areas in which civil society organizations are allowed to operate. Over the years, the proliferation of such organizations has meant that non-governmental support has developed its own type of bureaucratic bankruptcy. Kamrava explained that “with unintended consequences, Palestinian society, today, in the West Bank and to a lesser extent in Gaza, has become paralyzed because of the work of these civil society organizations.”

Kamrava concluded with what the road ahead might look like for Palestine, and offered three possible scenarios for the future of Palestine. The first of these is the model of a national rebirth in the wake of almost total annihilation, similar to Poland in the post-WWII period; the second is a model in which a nation is overtaken almost entirely by another civilization, similar to modern-day Tibet; and, finally, the third is a model in which a community of people are deliberately segregated into islands of deprivation, similar to the dispossession of native populations in America and Australia.
CIRS Hosts Reception for Gerd Nonneman, Dean of Georgetown University in Qatar

CIRS hosted a reception for Gerd Nonneman, dean of Georgetown University in Qatar, on April 18, 2016. The reception was attended by Georgetown University in Qatar faculty, students, and staff, as well as members of the Qatar community, including diplomats, community leaders, and invited members of the general public. Gerd Nonneman served as dean of Georgetown University in Qatar for five years, a period in which he oversaw a series of institutional developments leading to an expansion of the Qatar campus, an increase in specialized faculty, establishment of the Arabic heritage program, and sustained community engagement. Although Nonneman is stepping down as dean of the university, he will return to Georgetown University in Qatar as a professor and researcher in the coming academic year.
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