



Culture Made in Arabia

The Arabian Peninsula as a new major player on the Arab cultural scene

International Conference

CEFAS / Sorbonne Abu Dhabi / New York University Abu Dhabi

Conveners : Laure Assaf, Clio Chaveneau, Frédéric Lagrange

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Since the turn of the 21st century, the Arabian Peninsula has been both a major producer of cultural goods and a hub of cultural presentation, exchange and commerce. From book fairs to highly coveted literary and translation prizes, from upscale art galleries to ground-breaking museums, from literature to music and poetry, from “starchitecture” to the preservation of traditional material and intangible heritage, culture has become an asset and a stake in the growing influence of the Arabian Peninsula in the Arabic speaking world.

State-sponsored as well as private sector and individually driven endeavors have moved the Arabian Peninsula from the margins of contemporary Arabic culture towards the center, where it competes for prestige and soft power with the traditional beacons of urban cultural hegemony, such as Egypt and the Levant. With the help of considerable capital and heavy investment in education and multimedia platforms, cultural productions are not only showcased for local consumption but also exported throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Works of literary fiction, poetry, theater, music, cinema, television programs and fine arts, from high-end productions to commercial pop culture, thus shape a *Khaleeji* identity in contemporary Arabic culture.

This conference aims to stimulate discussion of the Arabian Peninsula as a new contender on the regional cultural scene, from state-led cultural policies to the development of a *Khaleeji* “pop culture”, understood both as commercial entertainment and as the grassroots cultural forms produced by local youth and by diverse migrant communities.

Papers are welcome on all aspects of cultural production and policy in the Arabian Peninsula. Topics may fall under (but are not limited to) one of the following axes:

• ***Cultural policies between nation-branding, regional ambitions, and global pursuits:***

As countries of the Arabian Peninsula seek to forge a cultural identity that will put them on the global map, papers might examine how they navigate the interplay between local concerns for the preservation of the region’s oral history and craftsmanship, and globalized standards of cultural legitimacy such as universal museums, arthouse cinemas, and

iconoclastic artworks. How do they reconcile modes of cultural production and exhibition formed elsewhere with local cultural practices?

Contributors might also address the regional and international ambitions of these policies. How are these cultural policies received by competing centers of Arab culture? How is the shaping of a cultural identity informed by economic, diplomatic, and political dynamics?

• *Production, reception and meanings of an Arabian “pop” culture:*

Are we witnessing the birth of a new “pop culture” in the Arabian Peninsula? As cultural productions *made in Arabia* take the front stage, contributors are invited to explore the relation between the fields of entertainment, mass consumption, and the media, in a region where the latter is often state-owned. Is pop culture merely a mass product channeling commercial strategies and dominant representations, or does it have the potential to challenge cultural hegemony? In short, is there a possibility for a “counterculture” in the Arabian Peninsula?

Papers might also examine the relationship between contemporary pop culture and traditional local “popular cultures” in the folkloric sense. What does the multiplication of TV shows, artworks, or clothing that repackage the national lore in a parodic and desirable version tell us of the relationship between pop and popular culture, and between local youths and national or regional identity?

• *Social, ethnic, and gender identities of cultural producers and consumers in the Arabian Peninsula:*

As this regions’ states are some of the most diverse in the world, papers may look at the respective roles of nationals and immigrants in the cultural industry. Papers will pay a specific attention to the way social, gender, and ethnic perspectives inform the production and reception of cultural goods. Who produces and consumes the contemporary culture of the Arabian Peninsula? How do these productions address the *Khaleeji* self and its various others?

Papers may also question the potential of these cultural productions to forge various communities along ethnic or generational lines. As these productions circulate along migration routes and through diverse media, can they become shared references across the Arabic-speaking world and in neighboring countries whose immigrants form the bulk of foreign residents? Does the inherently referential nature of culture contribute to form a common identity among generations who share a same set of cultural codes?

At a time when cultural actors and goods in the Arabian Peninsula are leaving the margin to become mainstream cultural elements of the 21st century, this conference seeks to gather scholars, cultural entrepreneurs, and practitioners, to analyze cultural policy and the emergence of new cultural productions in the region.

Proposals should be between 250 and 350 words and sent to :

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The deadline for proposals is April 15, 2020.