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CONGRESS

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Studies

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Panel 49

Yemen: construction and circulation of knowledge in times of war

The war in Yemen since 2015 has transformed society and its structure. It also directly affects the capacity of researchers, both Yemeni and foreign, to work on the current restructuring. The new political polarization, but also the risks involved, greatly constrain the accumulation of knowledge and the analysis of phenomena at play. The transformation of research methods, combined with the emergence of new issues related, for example, to the preservation of heritage in the face of destruction, affects all disciplines, from archaeology to political sociology. However, the demand for understanding remains and, because of the growing public interest in this torn society, can even be considered as growing.

The purpose of this panel is to reflect on the modes of construction and circulation of scientific knowledge about Yemen in times of war. It offers a multi-disciplinary perspective, questioning the relationship to the field, the collaboration between Yemeni and foreign researchers, but also the borders with expertise and political commitment. These issues, shared with other fields in North Africa and the Middle East, will be treated in a comparative perspective.

Person in charge : Laurent Bonnefoy (CNRS – CEFAS)

Discussant : Juliette Honvault (CNRS - IREMAM)

Program

Ashwak Anam (doctoral student, University of Rouen)

The Yemeni conflict in the French press (2011-2016)

Mounir Arbach (CNRS, Archéorient, University of Lyon)

Protecting Yemen's archaeological heritage in times of war

Despite the state of war, despite the division of the country into two zones with separate administrations, and despite the lack of political will to resolve conflicts, the Yemeni Antiquities Services, whether in Sana'a or Aden, have remained active since 2015, continuing to work for the preservation, conservation and protection of endangered archaeological sites and objects.

In collaboration with the European archaeological missions previously working in Yemen, particularly European ones, Yemeni institutions continue to list damaged or endangered sites and heritage, also developing new tools, for example using satellite mapping of archaeological sites.

Permanent contacts are maintained with the team of Yemeni museums, particularly in Sana'a, to feed the database and to organize technical training courses. CEFAS, despite its move to Kuwait, continues to play its role in strengthening technical, scientific and institutional cooperation with Yemen, with which ties of friendship have been forged for a very long time. The purpose of this presentation is to analyze the scope and limits of this remote action and to reflect on the state of an archaeological practice more than ever reduced to seeking to save what can still be saved.

Bachir al-Mohallal (doctoral student, François Rabelais University, Tours)

Thoughtful community action and the construction of the country: between field experience and scientific reflection

Since 2011, Yemen has been experiencing an unprecedented situation of crisis. This situation has worsened since the launch of a military campaign by a coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia in March 2015. This conflict has considerably deteriorated the economic and social situation. The destruction of critical infrastructure, the disruption of trade, commerce, and supplies, and the general collapse of the service delivery system have led to a significant deterioration in living conditions.

At the same time, however, community-based voluntary initiatives have increased in recent years within society, particularly in rural areas. Based on a field survey, we found that these initiatives, often led by individuals, sometimes grouped in ad hoc bodies called «village councils», are introducing new local modes of development. Despite their importance, these initiatives have remained isolated, poorly oriented and weakly sustainable. Drawing on our experience, at the junction of social sciences and work through an NGO, Pulse for Social Justice, our presentation aims to analyze these new local dynamics in the context of war.

Marine Poirier (CNRS, IREMAM Université Aix-Marseille)

Why and how to investigate Yemen at war without going to Yemen?

How can knowledge about Yemen be generated when there are limited or no opportunities to go there? More generally, how to produce empirically grounded knowledge about a society at war? For more than 6 years, the political situation in Yemen has made it necessary to explore remote survey methodologies or to investigate new observation sites. In this paper, I will come back to how I constructed a research object and a methodological device to investigate Yemen at war without going to Yemen, by investigating its exiled elite diaspora. It is a prosopographic and ethnographic study of the leading political personnel, which I define as those actors who inhabit and/or control specialized central institutions of government, recognized as exercising and embodying the political authority of the state. This study is based on biographical observations and interviews, the collection and analysis of private and institutional archives, autobiographical memoirs, the press and digital traces of the population under investigation. Access to these sources is facilitated by the fact that in the context of the war, the interlocutors are acutely aware of the importance of safeguarding the heritage and more generally the memory of Yemen and the State.