



Current Social Transformations in the Arab Gulf: Call For Papers

The Gulf region is playing a growing role not just in shaping the political scene and power relations in the Middle East region, but also in forming and restructuring social and cultural trends – be it directly or indirectly. Since the global transition to oil economies, just as much as the region has become a subject of international competition, it has become commensurately difficult to imagine a Middle East policy in which the interests and concerns of the Gulf's ruling elites do not play an important role. It has also become difficult to understand many of the social and cultural transformations in most Arab states without linking them to Gulf economic and ideological policies. Over recent years this has been to the extent that makes it possible to talk of the “Gulfization” of aspects of regional relations.

For instance, since the late 1970s, several researchers have paid attention to the aftereffects of the state-building process in the Gulf on shaping the social mores of the Arab middle classes. Much has been said about the shifts in values that accompanied the emigration of millions of Arabs to work in the Gulf States. The interaction of these migrants with the local communities and their emergence as a substantial economic force when they returned to their home countries led to radical transformations that not only contributed to the overall economic restructuring of the Arab states, but also led to the emergence of new patterns of religiosity and modes of consumption. Furthermore, they have contributed to the emergence of new social and ideological movements that continue to exert influence over Arab politics and society and that are refashioning identities in diverse and contradictory forms. This has led to the emergence of new forms of conflicts based on identity politics. Arab and non-Arab migrant labor has also contributed to Gulf societies by refashioning local awareness and reshaping local cultures, in a manner that has led to the emergence of various social phenomena.

The ancient cultural and civilizational interaction between the communities of the Arabian Peninsula and the communities of the Levant, Iraq, Egypt, and the Maghreb led to the cultural reforming of the region. In modern times, this interaction is still central to the formation of different political systems and patterns of knowledge production. In the current stage, the complexity and contradictions of these relations have had a fundamental impact on the course of the political transition, caused the failure of democratic transition, and fed identity-based polarization, as well as leading to the emergence of rival regional projects that have allowed regional and international powers to strengthen their influence in the region. Another consequence has been the emergence of new social forces that raised the banner of Salafism and Salafist movements which have represented a major challenge in many states.

The polarization witnessed in the region, coupled with stereotypes and ideological attitudes, has helped cover up decades of social and cultural transformation in the Gulf region, and also caused its peoples and countries to be portrayed as a static monolith, thereby concealing the great diversity that has always characterized the Arab Gulf region. Factors such as the revolution in the oil industry, the hegemony of the rentier state, and the effective political and economic coordination among the GCC countries caused the production of a somewhat similar model of political economy, which essentially enshrines the legitimacy enjoyed by the ruling families, and also led to the emergence of what might be called a Gulf identity based on shared interests, concerns, and culture. However, accelerating developments witnessed in the region and globally revealed fundamental contradictions between the Gulf ruling elites, within each elite, and within



each individual country, and divisions at the level of the people. Questions have once again been posed over the cultural, social, and economic transformations seen by the region. Over the past seven years, Gulf states (Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia) have witnessed popular protests that have taken various forms and were contained or suppressed in many ways. Two Gulf states (Qatar and Saudi Arabia) have also witnessed transitions of political power expressed in different ways. The Gulf crisis has puzzled many researchers and exposed shortcomings in research understanding the dynamics of Gulf power and society.

Meanwhile, the Gulf States today offer a new model of modern cities and towns that impose new forms of urban and social organization which provokes multifaceted debate. These cities have been marketed as creative centers that combine the global and the local. But they sometimes provoke controversy because of their reliance on types of social division that classify people according to their social status or their countries of origin. These new towns have also affected local communities and their symbolic and imagined systems, and remolded their social fabric by changing value systems. However manifold the reasons, these cities are now the focus of attention for millions of Arabs and foreigners looking for jobs, and the focus of attention for many different international companies seeking to establish a foothold in the Middle East.

For these reasons, *Omran*, the ACRPS journal for the social sciences, intends to publish a special issue that examines and analyzes the social, cultural, and economic transformations in the societies of the Gulf states. With this issue, the journal aspires to fill the knowledge gap and become a reference to help understand the social interactions in this region and their relation to the development of political structures (especially the state), and social structures (non-state identities such as regional, ethnic, confessional, and tribal). *Omran* welcomes contributions that use social analysis methods to understand different social phenomena in the Arab Gulf region. However, it suggests focusing on the following themes:

- **The political economy of the Gulf state, including the rentier structure and its social interactions:** This aspect seeks to understand the ability of the Gulf elites to reshape society through observing the logic of the rentier networks that are mainly connected to power relations. This theme also includes government efforts to diversify the economy and interpreting its successes or shortcomings, as well as the development of labor markets, the nature of foreign and national investments, the status of foreign workers, the nature of Gulf investments abroad, the position of the Gulf states in the global capitalist system, and the relations of its markets with transnational economic networks.
- **Legitimacy and legitimization in contemporary Gulf regimes:** this theme seeks to understand the social and historical conditions that establish the legitimacy of the ruling families in the Gulf, such as historical and religious legitimacy, charisma, and tribalism, and also to understand the nature of the political transition there and the sociological foundations upon which power is distributed. This theme also examines the relationship between the familial and the political in the Gulf states.
- **Politics of identity and culture in the Gulf states:** this theme seeks to examine the policies followed by the Gulf governments towards segments of their citizens on a doctrinal, identity, social or regional basis, and the effects of this for the reproduction of society. This is not just a question of understanding the problem of sectarianism and discrimination against citizens on the basis of beliefs, but goes beyond this to encompass the study of all forms of social exclusion that relate to many segments, whether from tribal backgrounds, stateless (*bidoun*), or others. It also extends to the study of identity and cultural discourse in educational curricula, the media, and in official and unofficial preaching activities. This



theme also approaches the issue of identity when many Gulf countries contain a majority of foreigners on their territory.

- **Social and ideological movements in the Gulf:** this theme examines formal and informal social and ideological movements and their social and historical depth including political protest movements, demand-based movements, religious movements (such as Wahhabism) and women's movements.
- **The Gulf city and patterns of urban organization:** this theme aims to cast light on the model of cities and towns that has emerged in the region, and so imposed various forms of social organization on the population based on their social and class status, or their nationalities. This theme focuses on the status of the (non-citizen) residents of Gulf cities and their economic and social relations with citizens.

Omran is accepting academic contributions based on social science methods that address one of the problems presented above, and encourages researchers to deal with case studies, or comparative studies between one country/city and another, that will help advance scientific knowledge on the subject being studied.

Those wishing to publish their articles and studies should send an abstract to the journal's e-mail, accompanied by an academic CV, by no later than June 15, 2018. The abstract should not exceed 500 words, including the proposed methodology for conducting the research. The summary will be subject to evaluation, and the sender will be notified of the decision by June 30, 2018. Completed papers can be submitted until no later than January 10, 2019, with a maximum length of 8,000 words. All research is subject to peer review.

Omran also accepts books reviews dealing with the same subject, of no more than 3,000 words. The book must have been published in the past three years, except for discursive articles that review a collection of books or articles on the subject under study.

All abstracts and inquiries to be sent to: omran@dohainstitute.org