9.00-9.40
Coffee, Fruit, & Pastries

9.45-10.25
Opening Remarks by Convenors

James Mark (University of Exeter)
Mostafa Minawi (Cornell University)
Keren Weitzberg (Queen Mary University of London)

10.30-12.50
PANEL I:
TRANSREGIONAL RACIAL IMAGINARIES
AND THE OTTOMAN LEGACY
CHAIR: JAMES MARK (UNIVERSITY OF EXETER)

10.30-10.50
Emre Susamcı (Cornell University)
Universalizing International Law &
the Obstacles of “Civilization” & “Race”
in Late 19th-Century Ottoman Empire

A significant concern of the European and Ottoman learned public in the second half of the 19th century was the distinction between “civilized” and “uncivilized,” as well as between sovereign states of the “family of nations” and entities regarded as outside the realm of international law and civilization. From a 19th-century European point of view, the admittance of non-European polities into the realm of civilized states posed a problem since it could have been used to invalidate already concluded favorable
treaties with non-European entities. As an alternative to allowing non-European polities into the family of nations, international lawyers developed a new benchmark: the standard of civilization. In this paper, I will trace instances of racialization through the benchmark of ‘the standard of civilization’ and Ottoman reactions to it that dismiss it as contrary to the principles of international law when applied to them. It is meant to contribute to global intellectual history by unearthing the entangled social imaginary of Ottoman and European intellectuals and jurists of the late 19th century.

10.55-11.15

Yair Wallach (School of Oriental & African Studies)
When did Ashkenazim become European?
Reflection on Yiddish-speaking Jews in the Late Ottoman Middle East

The migration of Ashkenazi Jews to Palestine in the late 19th and early 20th century put them in direct encounter with Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews and with (Muslim and Christian) Palestinian Arabs. This encounter has been described in racial and civilizational terms, putting Europeans (Ashkenazim) against Orientals (Sephardim, Ottomans, and Arabs); it is also described as a clash between colonial settlers and natives. And yet, how were these encounters racialized by the relevant participants and external observers? Did Ashkenazim understand themselves to be European? Were they understood in this way by locals? What role did the physical difference, sartorial code, and habitus play in such racializations? How did it relate to Jewish and Arab self-understandings and dominant race theories of the day, which categorized Jews (including Ashkenazim) as a Semitic race? In this paper, I will examine these questions through several examples that show the European consciousness was not a starting point, but rather, it developed among Ashkenazim arriving in Palestine and was manifested in ambiguous and contradictory ways.

11.20-11.30

Coffee/Tea Grab & Go

11.35-12.55

Ceyda Karamürsel (School of Oriental & African Studies)
“Turkish Decoration of Africa’s Noblest Son”:
Edward Blyden, Ottoman Imperialism, and Race-making at the Crossroads of Empires

In May 1905, the influential Americo-Liberian statesman, diplomat, and thinker Edward W. Blyden was awarded the Imperial Order of the Medjidieh by the Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II. Granted in recognition of the services he “rendered to the Mussulmans of West Africa” and celebrated with a lively ceremony that took place at the Liverpool Mosque, this decoration marked a significant moment in Blyden’s longstanding engagement with the Ottoman Empire and its sovereign, Abdülhamid II. Throughout the preceding four decades, Blyden had been envisioning and advocating for a Pan-Africanist ideology that aimed at the economic and political liberation of Africa, though not necessarily outside of an imperial framework and its civilizational fictions (and an understanding of race that underpinned those). This paper aims to offer a preliminary inquiry into the ties that Edward Blyden
(alongside such figures as Abdullah Quilliam, Mohammad Shitta Bey, and the West African Muslim community they purportedly represented) forged with the Ottoman Empire, paying specific attention to his journey to Palestine in the 1860s, his first direct appeal to Abdülhamid II in 1877, and his relentless support for the building of a mosque in Lagos in the 1890s. It argues that while typically not placed side by side with the Ottoman Empire, West Africa, particularly its Muslim populations, figured prominently in the Ottoman Empire’s imperial ambitions and imaginations, as well as in its highly pragmatic (though far from benign) formulations of race.

12.00-12.20

Piro Rexhepi (University College of London)
On Modernity/Coloniality and Ottoman/Post-Ottoman Present Pasts

This presentation examines the relativization of colonialism and racialization in Ottoman/post-Ottoman debates by looking at the ways in which studies of racism and colonialism are increasingly externalized outside Euro-American spaces to shift attention away from European modern/colonial projects of racialization - not as a sole source of racism and the modern regulation of bodies, labor and space, but as one of many of its sites. By focusing on the Ottoman/post-Ottoman projects of modernity, the presentation brings into consideration the need to address the modern/colonial terms of recognition, the specificities of local contexts, and their differences within the geopolitical space labeled Ottoman/post-Ottoman worlds. It looks at the processes of capitalist accumulation, coloniality, and modernity in Ottoman spaces and its legacies, continuities, and transformations in relation to the European expansion of colonial/capitalist modernity.

12.25-12.55

Panel I Moderated Discussion

12.55-14.15

Lunch
14.30-16.20

**Panel II: Social and Cultural Production of Racialized Subjects**

**Chair:** Nader El-Bizri (University of Sharjah)

14.30-14.50

**Ezgi Güner** (Boğaziçi University)

*The Effendi Legacy: Reconfiguring Ottoman Genealogies & Memory in Cape Town*

This paper addresses questions of race, memory, heritage, and kin-making in the transnational contexts of post-apartheid South Africa and post-Ottoman Turkey. It does so by focusing on the constructions and contestations of the Ottoman past in South Africa by examining the Effendi legacy in Cape Town. Abu Bakr Effendi (1814-1880) arrived in Cape Town in 1862 as the emissary of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülaziz to teach Islamic law and resolve the religious conflicts within the Muslim community. The nineteenth-century Muslim community of Cape Town was mainly composed of the political exiles and enslaved people brought from the East Indies by the Dutch colonial authorities. The legacy of Abu Bakr Effendi’s religious authority is a site of contestation and competition in today’s South Africa. Turkish governmental bodies and heritage entrepreneurs have recently put tremendous effort into ‘preserving’ his memory by renovating his tomb, incorporating it in the museums of Islamic heritage in Cape Town, and, most remarkably, by granting exceptional citizenship to his descendants. My work engages with the interlocking of post-apartheid racial politics in South Africa and the ethnoracialized boundaries of the citizenship regime in Turkey. It shows how blood becomes heritage, and biological racialism coexists with colorblind conservatism.

14.55-15.15

**Salma Hargal** (Université de Lille)

*Voices of Enslaved People in Late Modern Melḥūn Maghribi Colloquial Poetry*

The increase in human trafficking from sub-Saharan Africa in 18th and 19th-century Maghrib coincided with the emergence of narrative poetry in the Melḥūn genre. These poems offer rich narratives of fiction that often give voice to enslaved people. In this paper, I question the tendency of these texts to reflect the uniqueness or subjectivity of the enslaved or, conversely, to attribute preconstructed discourse to them. I also study the representations associated with enslaved individuals and the responses ascribed to them. I am particularly interested in how the social and cultural practice of poetry absorbs the social realities of slavery in domestic and urban environments. A key aspect of my investigation involves
examining the role of this literature in shaping stereotypes about enslaved individuals, with a specific focus on the way they contribute to the racialization of enslaved people. Finally, given that the authors are mainly urban men addressing a similar social audience, I also identify forms of gender-based domination and their intertwining with the institution of slavery.

14.55-15.05
Tea/Coffee Grab & Go

15.10-15.30 (remote)
Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf
(Georgetown University-Qatar)
Dark Knuckles: Preliminary Thoughts on Bleaching in Sudanese Skin-scapes

Color prejudice is a reality that presents a disturbing human paradox across the world. The skin’s mediating role in interpersonal dynamics exceeds its protective function. As Terrence Turner argues in his “The Social Skin”: “This objectively universal fact is associated with another of a more subjective nature, that the surface of the body seems everywhere to be treated, not only as the boundary of the individual as a biological and psychological entity but as the frontier of the social self as well.” (2012:486). In the Sudan, the subject of this presentation, this paradox is no exception. Phenotypical prejudices and their subsequent colorism, which the Miriam Webster Dictionary defines as: “prejudice or discrimination especially within a racial or ethnic group favoring people with lighter skin over those with darker skin,” is a lived reality. Skin color wields considerable power in Sudanese modes of thinking and systems of signification. The context of color sensibilities in this Afro-Arab society is astonishingly complex both in historical and contemporary terms. The history and context that drive people to resort to skin bleaching will be addressed.

15.35-15.55
Ifdal Elsaket
(The Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo)
Race in Egyptian Cinema Culture, 1920s-1960s

Understanding representations of race in 20th-century Egyptian cinema requires an understanding of local context as well as the global circulation of racialized celluloid images. From at least the First World War, Egypt was flooded with European and American films, many of which were saturated in Euro-American depictions of race and racialized Other. To what extent were these images responded to and/or consumed by Egyptian producers and audiences between the First World War and the 1960s? For this paper, I will examine early Egyptian magazines and films screened in Egypt to explore specifically the type of racialized images Egyptian audiences were exposed to. How did these images fuse with nationalist and postcolonial understandings of Egypt’s place in the world, and more generally, how can they help us better understand shifts in race and racialization in Egypt in the twentieth century?

16.00-16.30
Panel II Moderated Discussion
Massawa, now a city in Eritrea, was once a major slave port in Northern Ethiopia. During the mid-nineteenth century, Massawa was annually responsible for the export of three-quarters of the enslaved people from Abyssinia. Under Ottoman rule since 1557, Massawa saw a period of local governance from the mid-seventeenth century until 1848, when Ottoman control was reasserted. This period after 1848 was characterized not by Tanzimat-inspired transformations but by the pivotal role of the slave trade, Massawa's primary economic practice, within the Ottoman governance of the city. The Ottomans exploited this trade to fund their administration, ensuring that the local population economically benefited and remained content with Ottoman rule. Despite opposition from the British, French, and Christian Abyssinian elites, this governance approach persisted for almost a decade. It was not until after the Crimean War that robust European pressures led the Sultan to take decisive actions: appointing a new governor for Massawa in 1856 and officially abolishing the slave trade of Africans in 1857.

Building on this historical setting, the study delves into race and racialization in Ottoman Massawa by focusing on the interactions among Europeans, Ottomans, and Ethiopian Christians and Muslims and analyzing the Ottomans’ use of slavery as a tool to rule Massawa.

Prior to the discovery of oil and the patenting of pearl cultivation in the early 20th century, pearls were the Gulf emirates’ primary export commodity. Their Arabized national mythologies gleam with the
nostalgic luster provided by the history of the pearling industry: the masterplan for the museum complex in Abu Dhabi’s Saadiyat Cultural District was imagined figuratively as a ‘string of pearls.’ Zaha Hadid designed one such “pearl,” the Performing Arts Centre, to resemble an encrusted oyster clinging precariously to the coastline like a mollusk on a reef. However, the arduous labor of extracting pearls from the Gulf Littoral’s capricious seabed was conducted by an enslaved and indentured foreign workforce drawn from around the Indian Ocean. This paper explores how Arabized national myths have emerged out of pearl diving’s layered histories of race-based exploitation and exclusion. Growing critical scholarship on race and Blackness around the Persian Gulf has shown how complex racial formations have been produced through the transnational interactions of slavery, culture/religion, and the state. Drawing on theories of racial capitalism, this paper offers a first attempt at thinking through how ideas of race developed in the international maritime encounters between different systems of labor (enslavement, indenture, and trafficking) aboard pearling dhows plying the Persian Gulf in the 19th century.

10.35-10.55
Panel III Moderated Discussion

10.55-11.15
Coffee/Tea Break

11.15-13.00
Panel IV:
Slavery and its Legacies
CHAIR: MOSTAFA MINAWI (CORNELL UNIVERSITY)

11.15-11.35
Ayşegül Kavagil (Sarah Lawrence College)
Ghosts of Ottoman Slavery: Post-Racial Narratives and (Mis)Representations

The simultaneous existence and denial of slavery within the Ottoman Empire and of a racialized history in modern Turkey have had major repercussions. Despite their longstanding presence, the descendants of enslaved Africans—today, citizens of the Republic of Turkey—have until recently remained invisible both in the official historiography and in social research. This led to collective amnesia that resulted in the invisibilization of the Afro-Turk community in the Turkish public imagination and consequently was utilized in representing “race” as an external category: an imported problem from the West. Alongside race and racialization, discussions on slavery in the Ottoman Empire have also been consistently silenced or represented as “benign.” These (mis)representations continued to occupy an overwhelming space in mainstream discourse and operated in tandem with the erasure of enslaved female labor. The paucity of academic data on domestic labor facilitated the trivialization of these experiences in the historical record and left them vulnerable to erasure. As a result, incorporating Ottoman slavery in the broader Mediterranean region into studies on the legacy of slavery in global contexts has been unthinkable in large part because slavery in this region was heavily domestic—and, hence, gendered. Exploring the simultaneous existence and denial of slavery within the Ottoman Empire and of a racialized history in modern Turkey, this paper argues that the trivialized history of
Ottoman slavery operated in tandem with a larger global trend: the long-standing systemic marginalization of gendered domestic work from analyses of the development of capitalism and labor studies.

11.40-12.00

**Ismael Montana** (Northern Illinois University)

The Husaynid Dynasty and Racialization of the Religio-Judicial Scheme for Control of Enslaved Sudanic Africans in Ottoman Tunisia

This paper explores the impact of the Husaynid Dynasty’s religio-political framework on the integration of its populace into its centralization scheme and its influence on the racialization of Sudanic West Africans in Ottoman Tunisia. While numerous studies have contributed to our understanding of slavery and the slave trade in the MENA region, there is still a significant gap in our understanding how host societies integrated enslaved Sudanic Africans amidst the expansion of the African slave trade across Mediterranean destinations. In this paper, I will illustrate my argument using two case studies. The first revolves around Sidi Saad al-Abid, an ex-slave from Borno, whom the Husaynids inducted into sainthood to serve as a spiritual patron for the enslaved Sudanic communities that settled in Tunisia as a result of the trans-Saharan slave trade. The second case pertains to the institution of Bash Agha, known in local parlance as *al-Hākim fī al-Qishra al-Sawdāʾ* (the Governor Over the Black-skinned), which the Husaynids established to promote a judicial-administrative apparatus aimed at effective spatial and communal control of the Sudanic West Africans. The paper seeks to outline how the Husaynids racialized these institutions as integral to their religio-political platform for societal integration.

12.05-12.25

**John Thabiti Willis**

(Africa Institute Sharjah/Carleton College)

African Diaspora Family Formations in the Gulf

This paper seeks to construct a model of the African diaspora family and other community formations that have operated in the coastal regions of the Arabian peninsula and its nearby islands. It draws from two types of evidence: one in the form of the testimonies associated with enslaved people who applied for manumission at the offices of British political agencies, another from ethnographic research of bands who perform the songs of pearl divers and whose members are themselves the descendants of crew members of pearling vessels from the early to the mid-20th century. While historians have used these testimonies to understand the profiles and types of work performed and abuse experienced by enslaved people as well as their family formations under slavery, and ethnomusicologists have recently provided tremendous insight into the organization of music groups that perform pearling as heritage, one question that remains unanswered is how these sources together provide insights into the development of African diasporic communities along with what structures and processes gave shape and meaning to their community at a crucial moment between the end of Ottoman rule and the formation of the modern nation-state.

12.25-12.55

Panel IV Moderated Discussion

13.00-14.15

Lunch
14.15-16.00
Panel V:
Global Imaginaries of a Racialized World
Past and Present
CHAIR: KEREN WEITZBERG (QMUL)

14.15-14.35 (Remote)
Cevat Dargın (Columbia University)
Mountains & the Modern State: Environmental Racialization
& Colonial Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire & Modern Turkey

This paper explores the historical evolution of the racialization of the Kizilbash inhabitants in the Dersim region of Eastern Anatolia, popularly known as the “province inside four mountains.” It examines how the perception of the late imperial Ottoman and early republican Turkish state elites regarding this community transformed from being “Muslim sons of Muslims” in the 1890s of the Hamidian period to becoming “Kurdified Turks” in the 1910s and eventually “Turkish sons of Turks” by the late 1930s. The analysis highlights the role of mountains, for both the state elites and the nonstate people of Dersim, in this racialization process throughout the three political periods and argues that such epistemic violence facilitated the legitimization of the accompanying colonial violence, reinforcing the state's control and reshaping the identity narratives within the region.

14.40-15.00
Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen (Yale University)
Black Mediterraneans? Difference and Belonging in Today’s Middle Sea

The past decade has seen the burgeoning of scholarship on race and racialization in the Mediterranean region. In particular, migration scholars and activists have mobilized the concept of the Black Mediterranean to challenge the erasure of southern Europe’s colonial past and to highlight the inclusion of Black and other “others” among Europe’s citizenry today. The Black Mediterranean indexes a more complete understanding of the region not only as the site of the Enlightenment’s emergence but the laboratory in which modern racial categories were forged and integrated into imperial, capitalist, and
nationalist projects. But the Black Mediterranean, as told from its European shores, contains its own elisions, namely its failure to acknowledge the deeper histories of racial formations in the region and the diversity of African societies and subjects that constitute it in the present. In this paper, I consider regional histories of race and Black Studies debates on the nature of blackness beyond the Western Atlantic to forward a relational and coalitional understanding of race and anti-racist struggle in the Mediterranean borderlands. I propose Black Mediterraneans to express the multiple, overlapping, and sometimes conflictual spatial imaginaries that inform the politics of migration and difference today.

15.05-15.25

Sumayya Kassamali (University of Toronto)
Not “Sponsorship” but Racialized Servitude: Rethinking The Kafala System

Despite significant popular and scholarly attention to the Kafala system in recent years, particularly as it pertains to the question of race in the Middle East, the regional system for managing migrant labor continues to be explained using the translation/definition of “sponsorship.” Drawing from anthropological research conducted in Lebanon – where the Kafala system refers specifically to African and Asian female domestic labor – this paper asks what it would mean to approach Kafala not as a set of policies governing migration and employment, but as a social system writ large. Doing so makes it evident that Kafala has introduced new racial hierarchies into the societies where it is practiced, including ones that have altered gendered social relations in contemporary Lebanon. Using the example of the term Srilankiyye, the term for female Sri Lankan that can today be used for all migrant domestic workers in Lebanon regardless of country of origin, I argue that we have to understand the Kafala system as introducing a new form of racialization into the Middle East. Despite its very recent arrival to the region, this has had colossal consequences for those African and Asian migrants who live subjected to Kafala’s violence.

15.30-16.00

Session V Moderated Discussion

16.00-16.45

Coffee/Tea and Closing Discussion

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