

Program in Near & Middle Eastern Studies / the Graduate School of Social Sciences (G3S) University of Basel
Swiss National Science Foundation Research Project “Ottoman Afterlife in Jordan and Iraq”

Call for Applications

11th Annual MUBIT Doctoral Workshop in Late- and Post-Ottoman Studies in Basel
20 – 21 October 2023

States and Statelessness in the Post-Ottoman Middle East

with

Prof. Dr. Laura Robson

Oliver-McCourtney Professor of History at Penn State University, USA



Al-Am'ari Palestinian refugee camp in Ramallah, 1950. Photographer: Willem van de Poll

Organized and hosted by

Dr. Falestin Naïli
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About

The Annual MUBIT Doctoral Workshop in Late- and Post-Ottoman Studies is a **two-day workshop in Basel, Switzerland**, designed for international doctoral students conducting research on the Near and Middle East. The workshop consists of a two-day, intensive program in which select students work closely with invited experts. Successful completion of the workshop entitles students to 3 ECTS credits.

This year, we are thrilled to host **Prof. Dr. Laura Robson** of Penn State University, USA, to lead our 11th annual workshop on the topic of “**States and Statelessness in the Post-Ottoman Middle East.**” For more information on the content of the workshop, see below. The 2023 workshop will be held **in person** between **20 October (12:00 p.m.) and 21 October (13:00 p.m.) at the University of Basel.**

Application

Currently enrolled Ph.D. students who wish to attend the workshop should write an email to Falestin Naili (falestin.naili@unibas.ch) and Alexander Balistreri (alexander.balistreri@unibas.ch), with a **short text** summarizing their academic background and explaining how this workshop fits in to their research interests (max. 400 words, in third-person singular, in English). Applicants should also provide a **CV** (PDF, in English). Up to 15 applicants will be selected for participation in the workshop, based on relevance of their research project and a demonstrated ability to contribute constructively to the discussions.

The deadline for applications is 1 September 2023. Applicants will receive an answer regarding their participation by 8 September 2022, at the latest. The workshop is **free of charge**. Unfortunately, funding for travel and lodging is currently unavailable. We will provide successful applicants with information about more affordable accommodation in Basel.

Requirements for Successful Participation

Participants are entitled to 3 ECTS points for successful participation. Participants will receive by mid-September a list of readings to be completed prior to the workshop. Successful participation at the workshop is subject to the mandatory completion of the required readings in advance and active participation in the workshop discussions.



States and Statelessness in the Post-Ottoman Middle East

Course Description

The fractured, uneven, and often violent processes by which nation-states emerged from the postwar landscape of the former Ottoman empire have received exponentially greater scholarly attention than the concomitant and often similar processes that actively produced various iterations of post-Ottoman statelessness. This workshop begins to redress this omission by examining some manifestations of statelessness across the Middle East and North Africa in the period 1920–1967, emphasizing its emergence as both concept and practice—inseparable from the nation-state, to be sure, but marked by much more than merely the absence of citizenship or nationality.

From the multifarious production of wartime and postwar refugees in Syria and Lebanon to the mandatory remaking of Palestinians as stateless nationals to imaginaries of state-free revolutionary spaces in midcentury Algeria, iterations of post-Ottoman statelessness took on firm political shapes that suggested particular political futures for the Middle Eastern nation-state. In the post-WWI Mashriq, refugees and migratory communities (willingly and unwillingly) produced and enforced new national borders and provided political and territorial venues for the exertion of experimental forms of international and imperial power but also local authority. In Palestine, the mandatory production of a majority indigenous population—both Muslim and Christian—as stateless nationals within their homeland offered a new mode of simultaneously producing both state and statelessness to yield a particular kind of post-1948 political landscape in Palestine and beyond, one in which external actors could continue to maintain a territorial stake in the region. A different iteration of statelessness, rather more utopian in nature, emerged in wartime and postwar Algeria, where the capital of Algiers was reimagined as a kind of passport-free refuge for global revolutionaries of all stripes. In all these cases, the Ottoman Empire loomed as a historical memory of a more flexible (though not always less violent) iteration of state, one that these various imaginaries of statelessness continued to hold in mind as they reimagined the possible nature and consequences of an existence outside the state in this new postimperial era.

This workshop, in other words, posits that alongside a history of state-making in the Middle East we should also note a history of creating statelessness, and not as an absence but a presence. It seeks to investigate what statelessness has meant as a political practice in its own right, and to consider the particular legacies of the Ottoman empire to emerging concepts of living in some way beyond the reach of the modern state—or even doing without it altogether.

Workshop Sessions:

- 1 | Ottoman disintegration and the wartime making of Middle Eastern statelessness
- 2 | Colonial statelessness: Refugees, migrants, and borders in mandate Syria and Lebanon
- 3 | Ethnonational statelessness: Palestine and the new international system
- 4 | Utopian statelessness: The case of revolutionary Algeria



Prof. Dr. Laura Robson



Laura Robson is the Oliver-McCourtney Professor of History at Penn State University. She has published extensively on the topics of refugee and minority rights, forced migration, ethnic cleansing, and the emergence of international legal regimes around resettlement and asylum.

Her most recent books are [The Politics of Mass Violence in the Middle East](#) (Oxford, 2020), a history of the relationship between violence and the state in the twentieth-century Eastern Mediterranean, and [Partitions: A Transnational History of 20th Century Territorial Separatism](#) (with Arie Dubnov; Stanford, 2019), a comparative examination of the political “solution” of ethnic partition in the decolonizing world. She is also the author of [States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East](#) (University of California, 2017) and [Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine](#) (University of Texas, 2011), as well as the editor of [Minorities and the Modern Arab World: New Perspectives](#) (Syracuse, 2016).

Her work has appeared in many prominent scholarly journals, including the [American Historical Review](#), [Past and Present](#), [Journal of Refugee Studies](#), and the [International Journal of Middle East Studies](#). Her latest book, [Human Capital: A History of Putting Refugees to Work](#), will be published with Verso in late 2023.

She regularly engages publicly on topics related to refugeedom and asylum, and has contributed to a wide variety of national and international media outlets, NGO reports, and policy publications. In 2021–’22 she was a Fellow at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., and is now serving on the Center’s newly constituted [Expert Working Group on Forced Displacement](#).

With Jennifer Dueck, she is co-founder and co-editor of [StatelessHistories.org](#), a digital humanities project exploring the varied and multifaceted experiences of statelessness in the modern era.



Further Information

For more information on the MUBIT program, including reports on previous workshops, please visit:

<https://nahoststudien.philhist.unibas.ch/en/phd/mubit/>

For more information on the Program in Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Basel, please visit:

<https://nahoststudien.philhist.unibas.ch/en/>

Previous MUBIT Workshops

2013: *Turkish Nationalism: Approaching Ottoman and Islamic Legacies beyond Ethnicity, Secularism, and Westernism*, with Prof. Dr. Erik J. Zürcher and Prof. Dr. M. Hakan Yavuz.

2014: *Arab Nationalism: From Ottoman Empire to Colonial Mandates*, with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hasan Kayalı and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Michael Provence.

2015: *A Modern World in Flux. Studying Migration, Refugees, and Settlement Regimes from the Middle East and Beyond*, with Prof. Dr. Isa Blumi.

2016: *The Main Intellectual Currents in the Late Ottoman Empire*, with Prof. Dr. M. Şükrü Hanioglu.

2017: *From Unionism to Kemalism: Social and Political Transformation of Turkey*, with Prof. Dr. Asım Karaömerlioğlu and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmet Kuyaş.

2018: *Digital Media, Islam, and Politics in the Middle East*, with Dr. Akın Ünver.

2019: *Values and Status Negotiation: Media in the Middle East and North Africa*, with Dr. Roxane Farmanfarmanian.

2020: *Arab Marxism: The Global History of Revolutionary Movements in the Middle East in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, with PD Dr. Manfred Sing and Miriam Younes.

2021: *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, with Dr. Berk Esen

2022: *Palestine Versus the Palestinians? Writing Palestinians into History*, with Prof. Dr. Beshara Doumani

Contact

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