

Laure Assaf | Assistant Professor

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Research and Teaching Interests

Areas: Middle East, Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, United Arab Emirates

Keywords: Urbanity; Youth; Migration; Citizenship; Social Stratification

Disciplines: Anthropology; Urban Studies

Academic Employment

**Assistant Professor of Arab Crossroads Studies, Anthropology
and Social Research and Public Policy (Tenure-Track)**

New York University Abu Dhabi

2022–present

Assistant Professor of Arab Crossroads Studies and Anthropology

New York University Abu Dhabi

2018–2022

Postdoctoral Teaching and Research Fellow in Anthropology (ATER)

École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS)

2016–2018

Doctoral Teaching Fellow in Anthropology

Paris Nanterre University

2010–2013

Adjunct Lecturer in French

Northwestern University

2008–2009

Élève normalienne

École Normale Supérieure de la rue d'Ulm

2005–2010

Education

PhD in Anthropology

Paris Nanterre University

2017

Dissertation title: *Arab youths of Abu Dhabi. Status categories, urban sociability and the shaping of subjectivities in the United Arab Emirates*, supervised by Franck Mermier.

Bachelor of Arabic (Modern Standard)

Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO)

2014

Masters of Anthropology

Paris Nanterre University

2009

Bachelor of Anthropology

Paris Nanterre University

2006

Publications

Peer-reviewed articles.....

2025. "Crafting a Global Capital. Moral regions, emergent lifestyles, and the territories of alcohol in Abu Dhabi". *Revue Méditerranée*, Vol. 135.

<https://journals.openedition.org/mediterranee/15997>.

2023. "Girls' Fashion and Khaleeji Pop Culture. The cultural fortunes of the *gambū'a*, from hairdo to Internet meme". *Arabian Humanities*, Issue 18. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.11410>.

2023. "Dubāi sur orbite. Le musée du futur comme dispositif visionnaire". *Terrain. Anthropologie & Sciences humaines*, 79, "Futurofolies". <https://doi.org/10.4000/terrain.25786>.

2021, with Hélène Thiollet. "Cosmopolitanism in Exclusionary Contexts". *Population, Space, and Place*, Vol. 27, Issue 1. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2358>.

2020. "'Bienvenue dans le futur'. Images performatives du développement urbain aux Émirats arabes unis", *Les Cahiers d'EMAM*, 33. <http://journals.openedition.org/emam/3122>.

2020. "'Abu Dhabi is my sweet home'. Arab youths, interstitial spaces and the building of a cosmopolitan locality", *City*, Vol. 24, Issue 5-6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2020.1837562>.

2017. "Le shopping mall comme moment urbain: transformations des espaces marchands et pratiques citadines aux Émirats arabes unis". *Ateliers d'Anthropologie*, 44. <http://journals.openedition.org/ateliers/10413>.

2013. "La Corniche d'Abu Dhabi : espace public et intimités à ciel ouvert". *Arabian Humanities*, 2. <https://journals.openedition.org/arabianhumanities/2625>.

2013. "Espaces vécus et imaginés des rencontres amoureuses aux Émirats arabes unis". *ÉchoGéo*, 25. <http://echogeo.revues.org/13538>.

Edited volumes.....

2025, with Deepak Unnikrishnan. "The UAE Issue". *Wasafiri. International Contemporary Writing*. Issue 122. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02690055.2025.2461374>

2023, with Clio Chaveneau and Frédéric Lagrange. "Culture Made in Arabia. The Arabian Peninsula as a new major player on the Arab cultural scene". *Arabian Humanities*, Issue 18. <https://journals.openedition.org/arabianhumanities/11405>.

2021, with Delphine Pagès El-Karoui. "Introduction. Ethnographic Perspectives on Cosmopolitanism in the Gulf: State Narratives, Individual Trajectories and Transnational Connections", *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 11.2, pp. 171-182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2021.2188998>.

2019, with Mariangela Gasparotto and Marion Slitine. "Demain, le printemps. Pratiques d'imagination et d'anticipation dans le monde arabe", *Horizons Maghrébins*, 80.

2019, with Clémence Montagne. "Urban Images and Imaginaries: Introduction", *Arabian Humanities*, 11. <https://journals.openedition.org/arabianhumanities/4137>.

2017, with Sylvaine Camelin. "Shopping malls: l'avènement de la modernité ?", *Ateliers d'Anthropologie*, 44. <http://journals.openedition.org/ateliers/10365>.

Book chapters.....

2025. "Reflections on the Anthropologies of the Arab Gulf". In Alajmi A., Cantini D., Maffi I., Melliti I., *Social anthropology in the Arab World. The fragmented history of an uncomfortable discipline*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 77–98.

2025, with Claire Beaugrand. "D'Abu Dhabi à Londres : Stratégies genrées de distinction face aux visions étatiques des rôles de genre". In Boissière T., Gillot G., & Morvan Y. (eds.), *Espaces, Genre et Urbanités au Moyen-Orient*. Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu.

2024. "Le désert d'Abu Dhabi : appropriations multiples d'une marge urbaine". In *Déserts* (exhibition catalogue). Paris: Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, pp.103–107.

2024. "Ségrégation urbaine et anonymat à Abu Dhabi, Émirats arabes unis". In Mermier F. & Milliot V. (eds.), *L'anonymat urbain est-il universel ? Une anthropologie comparative de la citoyenneté*, Paris: Éditions Karthala, pp. 67–89.

2021, with Hélène Thiollet. "Migrant Cosmopolitanism in Emirati and Saudi Cities: Practices and Belonging in Exclusionary Contexts". In Lejeune C., Pagès-El Karoui D., Schmoll C. & Thiollet H. (eds.), *Migration, Urbanity and Cosmopolitanism in a Globalized World*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, IMISCOE Research Series, pp. 151–165.

2020. "Abu Dhabi". In Florin B., Madoeuf A., Sanmartin O. & Stadnicki R. (eds.), *Abécédaire de la ville au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient*. Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais de l'Université de Tours, pp. 12–14.

2018. "Who is the Right One? The Meanings of (Marital) Love in the United Arab Emirates". In Fortier C., Kreil A. & Maffi I. (eds.), *Reinventing Love? Gender, Intimacy and Romance in the Arab World*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 113–142.

2018. "'Voir le futur, créer le futur'. Les Émirats arabes unis face à la fin du pétrole". In Andrieu C. & S. Houdart (eds.), *La Composition du temps. Prédiction, événements, narrations historiques*. Paris: Editions de Boccard, pp. 115–128.

2014. "The Internet and Youth in the United Arab Emirates". In Al-Zoghby M. and B. Baskan (eds.), *State-Society Relations in the Arab Gulf States*. Berlin: Gerlach Press, pp. 13–36.

2013. "Autour d'un café : sociabilité des jeunes à Abou Dhabi". In Bonnefoy L. and M. Catusse (eds.), *Jeunesses arabes. Du Maroc au Yémen : loisirs, cultures et politique*. Paris: La Découverte, pp. 53–62.

Arabic translation:

لور عساف. ٢٠١٧. «في المقهى: حياة الشباب الاجتماعية في مدينة أبو ظبي». لوران بونفوا و مريم كاتوس، «الشباب العرب من المغرب الى اليمن. أوقات الفراغ، الثقافات و السياسات»، الدار العربية للعلوم ناشرون، ٥٣-٦٤

English translation: 2023. "Coffee shops and youth sociability in Abu Dhabi". In Bonnefoy L. and M. Catusse (eds.), *Arab youths. Leisure, culture and politics from Morocco to Yemen*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 43-52.

Awards and Grants

NYUAD Al-Mashhad Research Kitchen (\$50,000–\$75,000 per year)

2023-25

NYUAD AUES Research Kitchen (\$15,000–\$20,000 per year – Public Spaces project)	2021-25
NYUAD Arts and Humanities Divisional Research and Creative Initiative Grant	2019
Prix de thèse PSL en Sciences Sociales (Dissertation Award), Paris Sciences et Lettres	2018
Prix Michel Seurat (Doctoral research award), CNRS	2013

Creative Work

Soundwalk: "Improvised Access"

Multimedia publication

2025

Nurhidayat, et al. (Abu Dhabi Public Spaces Collective). 2024. "Improvised Access: Listening for African Migrants' Journeys through an Abu Dhabi Public Park." *Global Performance Studies*, 7 (2). <https://doi.org/10.33303/gpsv7n2a131>.

Gulf Homes: Material Cultures, Migration, and the Family

Events program

Jan–Feb 2024

Curation of a program of events around the *Being Borrowed* exhibition.

Being Borrowed. On Egyptian migration to the Gulf

Exhibition at The Project Space, NYUAD

Jan.–Feb. 2024

Co-organization and funding of the exhibition.

The Transformative Power of the Anthropocene

Exhibition at The Project Space, NYUAD

Sep. 2022

Co-curation of the section called "Rhythms of Abu Dhabi", with the Abu Dhabi Public Spacs Collective..

Teaching Activities

Undergraduate courses.....

At New York University Abu Dhabi:

- Youth in the Middle East* (6 semesters; SRPP and ACS elective).
- Gulf Urban Societies* (5 semesters; ACS required course and SRPP elective).
- Social Research and Public Policy Capstone Seminar (4 semesters; SRPP required course).
- Anthropology and the Arab World (2 semesters; ACS required course and SRPP elective).
- Beyond Nature-Culture* (1 semester; Core Colloquium course).
- Urban Studies and the Gulf* (1 semester; directed study).

At Paris Nanterre University:

- Textes Fondamentaux* (4 semesters)
- Introduction à l'ethnologie (2 semesters)
- Nature-Culture (1 semester)
- La Cuisine des anthropologues (1 semester)

Adjunct courses:

- Anthropologie des espaces domestiques,* Ecole Nationale d'Architecture de Versailles (2 semesters)
- Introduction à l'anthropologie,* MANUSASTRA Summer school, Cambodia (1 summer)
- Domaines de l'anthropologie,* MANUSASTRA Summer school, Cambodia (1 summer)

- Introduction à l'anthropologie française: la sorcellerie,* Un été à l'ENS (1 summer)

Graduate courses.....

At the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS), Paris:

- Le sujet et la ville dans le monde arabe. Une anthropologie du Golfe* (2 semesters)
- Écrire l'anthropologie: du terrain au texte* (4 semesters)
- Anthropologie des religions (1 semester)

Doctoral seminars:

- Secrets de terrain, Paris Sorbonne University, 2 years
- Lectures d'actualité en anthropologie,* École Normale Supérieure, 2 years

Recent Talks and Conferences

As Convenor.....

2025. International Conference "Theorizing Transience: Temporary Migrations in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific", NYUAD. Co-organized with Anju Paul (NYUAD) and Brenda Yeoh (National University of Singapore).

2025. Workshop "Decentering Intersectionality: Perspectives from the Gulf", Kuwait. Co-organized with Habibul Khonder (Zayed University, Abu Dhabi), Michael Pelican (University of Cologne), Hélène Thiollet (CNRS CERI Sciences Po, CEFREPA).

2024. Workshop "Routes and Roots: Perspectives on Migration and Belonging", NYUAD. Co-organized with Amin Moghadam and Anna Triandafyllidou (CERC in Migration & Integration, Toronto Metropolitan University).

2023. Workshop "Social Inequalities in the Gulf and Beyond", NYUAD. Co-organized with Michaela Pelican and Jonathan Nghé (University of Cologne).

2022. Panel "Khaleeji Public Spaces: Urban diversity, segregations, and sociability in the Gulf", *Insaniyyat - International Forum for Humanities and Social Sciences*, Tunis. Convenor with Cléo Chaveneau (Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi).

Lectures and Conference Papers.....

2025. "Tactical Transience? The category of youth as a resource in the United Arab Emirates", Theorizing Transience Workshop, NYUAD.

2025. "The Making of Status: Rethinking Socio-Ethnic Boundaries in the Gulf", International Conference "Crossing the Borders of the Arabian Peninsula," Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi.

2025. "La société urbaine dans les interstices de la culture : le cas des Émirats arabes unis", Table ronde "Les pensées en migration", CCMO, Paris.

2025. "Creating the Future? Competing regimes of historicity and the making of urban subjects in the United Arab Emirates", Futurescapes Workshop, 15th Gulf Research Meeting, Cambridge.

2025. "Expatriates and the Gulf's middle classes", International Sociological Association Annual Conference, Panel "New Expatriates in the Global City", Rabat.

2024, with Hélène Thiollet. "Rethinking Social Stratification in the Gulf: Transforming Frameworks",

IMISCOE Annual Conference, Panel "Gulf Migration Research from a Decolonial and Intersectional Perspective", Lisbon.

2024. "Centering Religion, Marginalizing Religious Norms. Trends in Abu Dhabi's urban development", Urban Studies Foundation seminar series, Religious institutions and actors in urban planning in the Middle East and North Africa, Cairo / online.

2023. "Becoming Subjects in and Through the City: The Arab Youth of Abu Dhabi". *Youth on the Move. Performing Urban Space in the Global South*, Online Lecture Series.

Dissemination

2025. "Villes futuristes, les mirages du Golfe," *France Culture* (radio interview), Série "Grands travaux, le sens de la démesure", <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/cultures-monde/villes-futuristes-les-mirages-du-golfe-5133050>

2025. "History of Memes in the Arab World," *Afikra / Media Majlis panel* (public talk), Northwestern University Qatar, Doha. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7yBWQJ60pU>

2024. "Urban Nostalgia as Belonging and Commodity," *Inloco Talks* (public conference), Dubai. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tM6QhMRla0c>

2024. "Villes et architecture du futur" in conversation with architect Jean Nouvel. *Les Jeudis de l'IMA* (public roundtable), Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris.

2024. "From oil to innovation: Changing economies in the Gulf," *Borders and Belonging* (podcast interview), Season 2, Episode 9, Toronto Metropolitan University. <https://www.torontomu.ca/cerc-migration/borders-and-belonging/>

2024. "Migrations et espaces urbains dans le monde arabe," CAREP (online roundtable), Public conference cycle *Migrations et sociétés arabes*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-3DRuNekGU>

2022. "Retour sur les grandes politiques de Cheikh Khalifa et leurs effets sur la société émirienne," *Les Clés du Moyen-Orient* (interview), <https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/Entretien-avec-Laure-Assaf-Retour-sur-les-grandes-politiques-de-Cheikh-Khalifa.html>.

2022. "Theorizing Up: Belonging," Conversational social science talks around the Sharbaka exhibition, Haraka Experimental Lab, NYUAD. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J50hl2Uxigc>

Academic Affiliations

- Associate Researcher at the French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA), Kuwait
- Member of the European Association for Social Anthropology (EASA)
- Member of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA)
- Member of the American Anthropological Association (AAA)
- Member of the Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS)

Languages

French: Native

English: Professional fluency

Modern Standard Arabic: Advanced

German, Italian: Basics