



Call for Papers

International Conference:

**Development, War, and Agriculture in the
Arab-Iranian Region**

Rethinking the Agrarian Question

November 6–9, 2025 | Tunis, Tunisia

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It was a commonplace even before October 7 2023 that by any measure, the sweep of states arcing from Morocco to Yemen and Iran is amongst the world's sub-regions most hammered by violence. Recent research indicates that the Arab region is also the world's most unequal. Less frequently acknowledged, that region is also central amongst the world's peripheries to the constitution, making, remaking and perhaps unmaking of the process of accumulation on a world scale. And perhaps even less noted is that such violence is intimately connected to the radicalism of the region's post-colonial attempted escape from underdevelopment.

If violence is omnipresent, its relationship to war, imperialism, agriculture, and development is far less present in the scholarly discourse. Instead, war itself is generally treated within regional studies by the disciplines and concepts of international relations, terror and counter-terror, oriented around the Palestine question, or treated as the child of self-activating confessional antagonism – “sectarianism,” as something which explains, the source and expression of millennial group hatreds, rather than something to be explained, or the product of a history of colonial and post-colonial capitalism and the relationship of each to polarized accumulation. Similarly, dictatorship is occasionally related to war, through analyses of “war economies,” “rentier states,” “crony” or “state-capitalism” and similar expressions. Yet such conceptual frameworks remain persistently immune to the governing dynamic of globalized and uneven accumulation.

In fact, Arab insertion within the world system remains the overall determinant of development, under-development (and de-development) outcomes. Similarly, the national question – that is, the suffering of the social formation from predation upon its political sovereignty or its productive forces, the organization of its productive forces and the political vehicles necessary for political self-determination including the politically-directing shaping of the productive forces – is inseparable historically and now from polarized accumulation. Furthermore, the agrarian question in its multiple, braided, and interpenetrating moments and articulations – politics, society, economics, nation, gender, industrialization, and ecology – is woven into the structure of global accumulation.

From the colonial period, the Arab region's agrarian and developmental prospects were inseparable from subordination to European monopoly capital and its linkages with trade ports and military installations. Patterns of monocrop cultivation, proletarianization, colonial primitive accumulation, and violence all marked the “early” colonial agrarian question, alongside its dynamic relationship with early millenarian movements for national liberation. The anti-colonial movements increasingly achieved success on the back of the region-wide and world-wide withdrawal of colonial power in the face of globalized peasant wars and new shifts in imperial power. Indeed, Arab republicanism in its romantic form was inseparable from nationalist

struggles filled with ambitions for social justice, land, and redistribution, and crystallized in state form wide-scale agrarian unrest. Such formations radicalized alongside increasing attention to internal agrarian inequalities and carried out systemic attacks on the colonial, and then neo-colonial, organization of landed power. Subsequent radicalization intertwined with the national question of Palestine, as it confronted colonial-capitalist and imperialist power: Zionism.

Post-colonial state planning encountered agrarian questions articulated around the relationship of party and state to the peasants, the role of agriculture in national industrialization and planning, the question of each to social well-being and the improvement of national productivity and production. Subsidies for food, import-export balances, and agricultural inputs into secondary processing weighed heavily on plans and politics as ideas from the USSR, China, Egypt, and India weighed on national thinking.

As radical developmentalism was diverted into state capitalism of various contours – with the exceptions on ongoing peninsular revolutions and state power in Dhofar and South Yemen – agriculture remained a central field of social reproduction, capitalist consolidation, and victim of de-agrarianization. Green Revolutions unfurled across fields and dams were erected across rivers. States generally invested in heavy machinery in the countryside, stabilized small and medium peasants where necessary and bet on the strong where possible.

Post-1991 state-capitalism lurched into agrarian de-development, as “politics” through war and economics through neoliberalism desiccated the regional rural social structure and the agrarian question became a field for on the one hand, regional warfare at the hands of foreign powers and on the other, hollowing out of well-being through neocolonialism as poverty rapidly increased and rural flight accelerated. By the 2000s, the agrarian question often returned to the national plane as it had been in the days before the end of colonialism and semi-colonialism: asymmetric militia forces from slums and rural zones turned to arms to conquer or defend sovereignty or obtain state power, from Lebanon to Palestine to Yemen. On the “social” plane new forms of cooperatives emerged alongside interest in new forms of agroecology and attempts to engage with the “new” peasant internationalism associated with La Via Campesina.

While classic Arab region social thought engaged deeply with all of these questions, the agrarian question has only recently re-emerged as a central analytic for investigating Arab region social, political, ecological, gender, and national dynamics. This conference aims to contribute to that renaissance and to bring Arab region social investigation into dialogue with tricontinental investigation. Axes of investigation will include:

- The history of regional peasantries and their role in anti-colonial struggle and post-colonial state building
- Paths of regional rural development and rural out-migration as part of social pacts
- Urban-rural rift in exchange and development
- The gender contradiction in the region
- Sectarianism and the agrarian question
- The interaction of war and agrarian devastation
- Changes in analysis of rural social formations
- Arab development outcomes

- The social bases of contemporary regional military forces
- The rural planning policies of contemporary Arab states and Iran
- Regional economic integration and international trade partnerships
- Intellectual history of planning and development

Submission Guidelines:

Abstracts: 500 words (max), outlining research questions, methodology, and key arguments to be submitted to conference@osae-marsad.org with a curriculum vitae by July 31, 2025.

Full Papers: Selected participants will be notified by August 5, 2025, and must submit completed papers (7,000–10,000 words) by 31 October 2025.

Publication: OSAE team will try to submit proceedings to Middle East Critique, Agrarian South, and an edited volume.

Funding for travel and lodging will be partially available, and prioritized for participants from the tri-continent, and will be pending the receipt of full papers.

Full papers will be required for participation in the conference, and proceedings will be published in university presses and selected journals (Middle East Critique, Agrarian South).