SEXUALITY AND SPACE
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Meeting, April 17, 2007, San Francisco

Session 2b
‘Sexuality beyond the
Euro-American Province(s)’

Gordon Brent Ingram
Globalizing homosexual & male guest worker identities:
The strategic role of Dubai’s Open Beach
How important and strategic are certain public spaces in this age of intensified globalization and flows of information on sexual cultures and human rights?
Dubai’s Open Beach is one of the larger and more visible public sites in the Middle East for homosexual males to meet and sometimes to have sex on-site –
and its social fabric was largely formed through the current period of intensifying globalization.
Dubai is on the extreme edge of the Middle East and is on a unique cusp of Arab, Persian, South Asian and African cultures – and diasporas.
Eighty per cent of its population are non-citizen guest workers and professionals sometimes allowing for a relative anonymity.
Most of the men who meet there are guest workers in the UAE are employed on contracts that will be extended for only a few more years (with limited prospects for public sex back home).
What is the broader significance of a beach where hundreds of men meet every day and have furtive sex in adjacent areas?
Could there be a vague relationship between assertion of cooperative desires and site-specific assertions of rights for workers and of nascent labour solidarity?
1. Problem statement: Homosexual & queer sites as locations of resistance under globalization
2007 Rio de Janeiro gay beach at Posto 9
Divided Beaches

Four of Rio de Janeiro’s elite beaches are subdivided by 12 numbered lifeguard stations called postos. Each stretch of beach has a culture of its own.
Cairo’s better-known cruising sites often see police harassment and arrests.
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<tr>
<th>Beach Instructions</th>
<th>نصائح سماح للمواطنين</th>
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<tr>
<td>Please Do Not Operate After Sunrise</td>
<td>لا تقم بالتجريف بعد الفجر</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please Do Not Operate After Sunset</td>
<td>لا تقم بالتجريف بعد الغروب</td>
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<td>Please Do Not Operate In Shark Areas</td>
<td>لا تقم بالتجريف في أماكن القرود</td>
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<td>Please Do Not Operate In Blind Areas</td>
<td>لا تقم بالتجريف في المناطق المغمورة</td>
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<td>Please Stay In The Shaded Areas</td>
<td>ابق في المناطق المظللة</td>
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<td>Please Keep Your Designated Area</td>
<td>ابق في مكانك المحدد</td>
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Thank you

www.parkandrecreation.gov.ae
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<tr>
<th><strong>BEACH INSTRUCTION</strong></th>
<th>تعليمات الشاطئ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please Do Not Swim After Sunset.</td>
<td>لسناكم يرحب عدم السباحة بعد غروب الشمس.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please Do Not Swim If Red Flag Is Raised.</td>
<td>يرحب عدم السباحة في حالة رفع العلم الأحمر.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please Do Not Swim At Current Areas Or Close To The Rocks.</td>
<td>يرحب عدم السباحة عند الصخور وفي مناطق التيارات البحرية.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Are The Responsibility Of Their Accompanying Adult.</td>
<td>مسؤولية الأطفال تقع على المرافعين الكبار.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please Conserve Marine &amp; Terrestrial Environment &amp; Do Not Damage It.</td>
<td>يرحب المحافظة على البيئة البحرية والبرية وعدم التهاجم عليها أو إتلافها.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please Keep The Beach Clean &amp; Do Not Leave Garbage.</td>
<td>يرحب المحافظة على النظافة وعدم ترك المخلفات على الشاطئ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Pets Allowed On The Beach.</td>
<td>لا يسمح بإصطحاب الحيوانات على الشاطئ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please Conserve Marine &amp; Terrestrial</td>
<td>يرجى المحافظة على البيئة البحرية والبرية وعدم</td>
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<td>Environment &amp; Do Not Damage It.</td>
<td>الاتصال بها أو إتلافها.</td>
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<td>Please Keep The Beach Clean &amp; Do Not Leave</td>
<td>يرجى المحافظة على النظافة وعدم ترك المخلفات</td>
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<td>Garbage.</td>
<td>على الشاطئ.</td>
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<td>No Pets Allowed On The Beach.</td>
<td>لا يسمح باصطحاب الحيوانات إلى الشاطئ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Barbecue Or Using Fire Or</td>
<td>لا يسمح بالشواء أو إشعال النار على الشاطئ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camping On The Beach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Administration Will Not Be Responsible</td>
<td>الإدارة غير مسؤولة عن أية حوادث شخصية أو</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Any Personal Accident Or Theft</td>
<td>سرقة أو إهمال.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Action Will Be Taken For Not</td>
<td>مخالفة التعليمات أعلاه تعرضكم للمساءلة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complying With The Above Instruction.</td>
<td>والإجراءات القانونية.</td>
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**Thank You**

www.publicparks@dm.gov.ae
For many the Open Beach is about sensual pleasures, this locale also represents survival and refuge in a regional politic and milieu of religious cultures that continue to be hostile.
In 2005, Dubai saw its first labour demonstrations in decades and today worker organizing and solidarity is intensifying. Actions have occurred very near the Open Beach.
Has the Open Beach also become a site for exchange of information and perspectives related to labour solidarity and activism – as well as a place for homosexual expression?
In this hyper-globalization, where labour is utterly subservient to capital, is there a continuum of resistance between sites of (often group) erotic pleasure and labour resistance?
2. Diversifying uses of & goals for mapping the spaces of sexual minorities
There are very different goals in mapping and describing strategic sites at the Open Beach. The users have particular goals in map formation as to police, activists and scholars.
Dubai Municipality and urban planning and design consultants, who are typically UK-based, have certainly been mapping this area and its patterns of use and to very fine-scales.
Millions have been spent to make the beach serve a wider range of social groups and to keep the area from being dominated by so many semi-naked males.
The shifting configurations of networks defined by ethnicity, language, and class can be mapped though in Dubai these communities and interactions are quite fluid.
Mapping the decolonisation processes in communities with non-European sexual minorities remains important work in much of the world.
As a protectorate, the Trucial States maintained a local ruling class (though capital and business direction often came through Bombay with political and military control from London).
In the UAE, there are local dynamics that play out in the area between men of Arab and Persian origins and mixed-race Emiratis with African and Balochi heritages.
3. Homosexuality after orientalism
“Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is a veridic discourse about the Orient[.]

Edward Said
It would be a bit didactic to re-work Said and argue that, “orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over [homosexual bodies of] the Orient
than it is a veridic discourse about [the diversity of homosexualities in] the Orient[.]

But aspects of such an analogy are correct.
Burton’s 1884 introduction to *One Hundred and One Nights* illustrates how heteronormativity and the supposed superiority of Western culture have been conflated to justify
imperial domination over the Middle East.
“The general tone of The Nights is high and pure. The devotional fervour often rises to the boiling-point of fanaticism. The pathos is sweet, deep and genuine; tender, simple and true,
utterly unlike much of our modern tinsel. Its life, strong, splendid and multitudinous, is everywhere flavoured with that unaffected pessimism and constitutional melancholy.
which strike deepest route under the brightest skies and which sigh in the face of heaven.”
Soon after publication of *One Hundred and One Nights*, Burton posited a Middle Eastern sphere of homosexuality, the Sotadic Zone in the latitudes of 30° and 43° degrees North.
So if we strip away the Western conceits (and insecurities) in learning about Middle Eastern homosexualities, two neo-orientalist blinders become evident.
The first ‘reality’ that is often obscured is that both the Middle East and Islamic societies (two geo-cultural spheres that are only vaguely and partially overlapping) have a
diversity of sexual cultures and cultural interpretations of sexuality.
Attempts at understanding the Open Beach in terms of a supposedly homogenous pan-Arabism or some naive kind of pan-Islamism contrast with renewed localism in the Gulf.
The second blinder is the lack of understanding of the tensions between Islam and secular Arab culture (and language) – and to a less extent with minority languages and cultures.
4. The queerness of hyper-globalization
But Dubai these days is mostly a noisy, rough, unkempt city -- one of the world's largest construction sites. Construction work is going on throughout most of the urbanized coastal strip, and the jackhammers can still be heard from the terraces of seaside hotels at night.

In five or six years, the around-the-clock construction work will produce a patchwork metropolis, a place with many town centers, divided up into theme parks for living, working, shopping, going out -- a post-urban city the likes of which has never existed before. And it will be an architectural mess: an aesthetic blend of Shanghai, Las Vegas, Disney World and southern Tenerife.
Dubai in 1940 consisted of four villages: Al-Shandagah, Deirah, and Bur-Dubai along the inlet and Jumeirah Beach and Satwa in the upper left.
Dubai 1949
Initial phase of Dubai industrial port in the late 1960s
Dubai 2006
While hyper-globalization does not ‘queers’ people, highly market-based management of labour, where far more men than women are brought in as migrant workers,
where both the state and religion have been subsumed by capital, few of the regulatory mechanisms that pressure males towards heterosexuality have been functioning.
There are two explanations for why Dubai’s frenetic mode of growth and economic globalization, have fostered opportunities for homosexual contact (and some solidarity).
The first explanation is simple: the Open Beach is being left as a kind of escape valve and as way to appear more tolerant.
A second explanation centres on the opportunities that arise in inter-cultural workplaces with highly mobile (and vulnerable) single males.
A workplace solidarity emerges that responds to the hyper-exploitation and emotional vagaries of the migrant worker and then fuses with consumer culture.
The religiousness of the market fundamentalism, combined with the decline of the regulatory apparatuses of the state, makes homosexuality less of a focus for repression.
And police forces in Dubai are sensitive about not being too brutal with sexual minorities so as to avert scandals that could put off tourists.
The Dubai model boils down to a self-consciously corporate approach to government: a can-do attitude that appeals to business, speed in decisions possible under an authoritarian system and achieving results that create momentum. The approach infuses the landscape. In a gesture at efficiency, government buildings bear the department's Internet addresses on their facades. Advertisements tantalize with a stilted lingo, a sort of Arabic newspeak. One company's ads read: "Responsibility is our motto," "Progress is our specialty," "Excellence is our goal." English translations followed. Even McDonald's has picked up the vocabulary. "High quality is our standard," one ad reads. ("I'm lovin' it," it says underneath.)

washingtonpost.com

The Towering Dream of Dubai

By Anthony Shadid
Washington Post Foreign Service
Sunday, April 30, 2006; A01
Celebrate the joy of togetherness
Celebrate shopping!
Celebrate the joy of togetherness
Celebrate shopping!
Dubai, which is part of the United Arab Emirates, represents turbo-charged free-market capitalism at its purest -- sometimes crass, often over-the-top, and always in motion. Home to more than 1.2 million people, more than 80% of whom are resident aliens, Dubai is as much a multicultural melting pot as New York City was in its late 19th century heyday. And like New York then, Dubai teems with winners and losers, the rich and not-so-rich, and immigrants who often find that life in the glittering metropolis is cold, hard and unfair. But the government maintains order, spends billions on infrastructure and is dedicated to establishing the city-state as a global capital of, well, capital.
But a darker undercurrent pervades the success of Dubai. Hundreds of thousands of foreign workers toil with few rights and sometimes just above subsistence. Unrest has mounted; last month, laborers rioted near the site of Burj Dubai, planned as the world's tallest skyscraper, where a new floor is added every week. The Islamic piety visible in the rest of the Persian Gulf has receded behind a rollicking nightlife of bars, clubs and prostitution so rampant it is assumed to have official sanction. The city has a history as a shipping hub for contraband, including illegal drugs and nuclear weapons components. Rumors of money-laundering are laced through the real estate speculation that has sometimes driven prices to double in six months.

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Mafiwasta.com aims to lobby the UAE to sign up to core ILO conventions allowing for freedom of association - ie trade unions...

www.mafiwasta.com
Labour unions could soon be set up in the UAE, a senior official has said. Dr Khalid Al Khazraji, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, did not give a specific date within which the unions will be set up...

posted on 27/04/2005
5. Towards a New Materialism: Theory & methods for studies of sexuality and space
“[T]he lost geography of the public sphere comes with a concurrent loss of politics[.]”
Neil Smith and Setha Low
2006
What would be a body of theory, approaches and research methods that could reconstruct a ‘lost geography’?
One term for new constellations of more empirically-based theory and research methods is “New Materialism.”
New Materialist theory includes the following tenets. Theory is based on observable relationships that are not entirely unique and that can be reconfirmed in the same or related locales.
All social-environmental relationships exist within contexts of political economies that warrant careful consideration in research design.
In contrast to more didactic interpretations of historical materialism from the 19th and 20th C, New Materialism recognizes significant inter-relationships between political economy and ideas.
So in contrast to early Marxism, New Materialism recognizes that culture and ideas do have human environmental impacts that are only partially ‘managed’ by political economies.
New Materialism recognizes that the social roles of urban environmental planning and design are expanding and also are not fully subsumed and managed by capital and political power.
Instead, planning and design are become partially autonomous spheres of power (and culture) within local and regional political economies.
6. Local political economies of homophobia under globalization
But what makes this place more than a just a curious shopping haven is the fact that it provides an alternate model to the current ethnic and religious strife rending the region a few hundred miles to its north. In Dubai, no one cares what you believe or to which God you pray. The only criterion for success and social acceptance is the almighty dollar. It is hyper-capitalism both in attitude and practice, complete with banking laws so noninvasive that they make Switzerland look unattractive.
The state is not disappearing under globalization. In the UAE, the two major levels of government are just ‘going into the closet’ – at least for appearances sake on the international stage.
The following are some of the most important levels of political economy that warrants exploration in fully understanding the dynamics at Dubai’s Open Beach:
1. demographics especially related to gender, ethnicity and migrants;
2. culture and custom;
3. history of the state (and colonialism);
4. legal history;
5. shifting patterns of ownership and flows of capital;
6. power, state-craft and attempts at power-sharing; and
7. dynamics of urban environmental planning and design
Sheikhdoms of the northern United Arab Emirates with the two portions of northern Oman in yellow (and Dubai in beige)
Five different neighbourhoods, reflecting divergent political economies and response to globalization, exist adjacent to or near the Open Beach.
The Open Beach exists in a kind of fissure between poorly integrated globalization processes – with respective lapses and gaps in decision-making.
Dubai’s Open Beach
Jumeira Beach
(a 10 km strip of luxury hotels)
Sahara
Jumeira Sheikh Zayed Road
At the heart of what Dubai and its globalization are creating, two cities overlap. One is a dystopic, even soulless vision of the future, where notions of civil society, individual rights and identity are subsumed in the logic of capital. The other is a rare triumph of the private sector in an Arab city that provides a model for prosperity and a force for integration, reversing decades of disappointment and defeat.
7. Mapping spaces of resistance under hyper-globalization: Minority sexualities & discounted labour
In examining relationships between capital, labour, economic diversification and multiculturalism under globalization, the Open Beach can be considered a laboratory.
How can collective experiences of intimate acts and resistance be mapped? How could male homosexuality be mapped relationship to male labour solidarity?
Research goals, and related programmes and agendas, can be very different depending on institutional affiliations, citizenships and funding sources.
What are the power relationships behind such divergent forms of social mapping?
What are the social design and engineering agendas? Who conducts the research? Who provides the information? Who pays for the information and who benefits?
8. Critical research methods after cognitive mapping
The following are some of the forms of inquiry needed to understand dynamics of social groups and sites in a rapidly changing and volatile political economies and migrant milieu.
1. Demographic information
2. Semi-structured interviews
3. Participant-observation, involving a diverse team, may yield some crucial data on acts, sites and social groups.
9. Towards activist cartographies & better cognizance of implications for public policy
Today in Dubai, there are divergent uses of data on furtive sexual sites which, if transmitted carelessly, could be used by the police and immigration authorities (as part of repression).
And urban planners and designers continue to misuse data from studies such as those embarked upon here to create oversimplified guidelines on social groups, activities and needs.
This paper is placed on a personal website for the months of April and May 2007 at,


and is NOT intended for general public access through the internet – in order to minimize the possibilities word of the presentation in San Francisco getting back to homophobic authorities in Dubai.
10. Conclusions: The prospects of strategic public sites for sexual & labour resistance under hyper-globalization
The Open Beach represents a meeting point, and arena perhaps, for Middle East male homosexual cultures – in the context of trans-Arab religious, political and legal institutions.
Dubai’s Open Beach continues to afford homosexual expression because it is an environment in which it is difficult to conduct research on social relationships.
Even with strong sets of empirical data over time, conclusions on social groups, extent of sexual expression, locations of acts, and exchange of ideas will be difficult to make.
The question is whether or not this phase of the domination of nation states by capital, secular discourses of tolerance and human rights can be re-established.
In a curious way, the men of the Open Beach can teach us a great deal.
To comment on this research and to ask to be informed of subsequent versions of the paper, send an email to hotel_railtown@yahoo.ca
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