

### Bridge walk

*a series of lectures on bridging the gap between different faculties and disciplines*

Date & Time: Wednesday 11.12.2024 | 17:00 – 18:15

Organizers: Mohammad Khair Nahhas & Fares Damien

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# Science and Technology Studies (STS), modern Middle East History, and the Non-human turn

***Katyoun Shafiee***

*History Department, University of Warwick*

### Abstract

Scholarship in STS has helped transform the writing of history by developing new ways of thinking about what the political and the technical are and how they work. Historians of the modern Middle East have expanded on these microstudies to think about the larger, more extended effects beyond the laboratory, and to reconfigure the role of nature and technology in the reassembly of questions of agency, knowledge production, governance, political community and nation, and possibilities for democracy in the region. The discussion tracks the turn to the *material* or *technical* in modern Middle East History by placing the nonhuman at the center of the analysis of power to consider questions of energy and democracy, and the political agency of the multinational corporation. As an example, the talk explores specifically the role of BP calculating technologies in building the British-controlled oil industry in southwest Iran in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Biosketch

Katyoun Shafiee works on the history and material politics of large-scale infrastructures in the modern Middle East and the kinds of expert knowledge (economic, scientific, and technical) generated about them, particularly concerning energy networks. Her research and writing draws on tools from science and technology studies (STS) and post-colonial theory to rethink historical and political analysis with specific regard to non-human actors. She is the author of *Machineries of Oil: An Infrastructural History of BP in Iran* (MIT Press, 2018). Her second forthcoming book considers the role of neoclassical economics and the soil sciences in the politics of water resource development through the building of a large-scale dam in southwest Iran, along the Persian Gulf.