

Launch Event - BU Research Network for MENA Studies

26th November 1:00-4:00pm at KG01

Kimmeridge House, Talbot Campus, Bournemouth University

Register here on [Eventbrite](#) or by scanning the QR code below



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Programme

1.00pm	Introduction – What is MENA?	Dr Mona Seyed Esfahani
1.15pm	First Panel – The Colonial Gaze Across Media, Technology & International Law	Dr Nicola De Martini Ugolotti (Chair)
	Upcoming Monograph: 'Drones, Settler Colonialism and International Law: How Israel Became a Drone Superpower' (Routledge, 2025)	Dr Yaar Dagan
	Why is no one talking about Sudan?	Hadil Kekhya & Oluwasijibomi Fola Akande
	The MENA Media Discourse	Dr Max Mauro
2.00pm	Refreshment & Networking	
2.30pm	The International Family Tracing Service of the British Red Cross	Rayeesa Mahomed
3.00pm	Second Panel – MENA in the Intersectional Lens	Abier Hamidi (Chair)
	Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa	Ayşe Kayra Özdemir
	“Resistance and Protest” and/or “Negotiation and Joy”: The Journey of Iranian Women in Men’s Football Fandom	Dr Payam Ansari & Zahra Termeh Eskandari
	Empowering Ethnic Minorities and Women Entrepreneurs in MENA: Unlocking Innovation in a Changing Economic Landscape	Balpreet Kour
3.30pm	Q&A with speakers + Plenary discussion	

1.00pm	Introduction – What is MENA?	Dr Mona Seyed Esfahani
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Dr Mona Seyed Esfahani is a Principal Academic in Marketing Communication and the Co-Director of the BU Research Network for MENA Studies. Her research focuses on innovation adoption and communication, as well as innovation in healthcare. Dr Esfahani serves as the chair Health and Innovation Special Interest Group at ISPIM and works with international partners to understand and improve Medtech and surgical innovation adoption and communication in the healthcare industry. She is interested in application of new technologies in healthcare and currently exploring the use of Virtual Reality in pain management. Another project is positive storytelling (@NHSBLUEHEROES), as a way of communicating positive care outcomes to healthcare workers.

1.15pm	First Panel – The Colonial Gaze Across Media, Technology & International Law	Dr Nicola De Martini Ugolotti (Chair)
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Nicola De Martini Ugolotti is senior lecturer in Sport and Physical Culture at Bournemouth University, and member of Associazione Frantz Fanon in Turin, Italy. He completed his PhD in Physical Cultural Studies at the University of Bath, after a MSc in Medical Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, and several years of professional activity as a clinical psychologist with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Italy. His interdisciplinary research focuses on leisure and expressive forms of physicality (from capoeira and parkour, to dance and music-making) as lenses to address the reciprocal constitution of bodies, spaces, power and subjectivities in contemporary contexts of (forced) migration, uneven urban changes, and social exclusion. Nicola is an Associate Editor of the Leisure Sciences journal, and member of the editorial boards of the Leisure Studies and Sociology of Sport journals. His work has been published in journals/books across leisure, urban and migration studies, sociology of sport and cultural geography.

Upcoming Monograph: 'Drones, Settler Colonialism and International Law: How Israel Became a Drone Superpower' (Routledge, 2025)

Dr Yaar Dagan



Dr Yaar Dagan is Programme Leader for LLB Law (Student Experience & Engagement), Lecturer in International Law, and a researcher at Bournemouth University, the Department of Humanities & Law, Faculty of Media & Communication. Yaar is the Co-Director of the BU Research Network for MENA Studies. He is a member of the BU Law Research Network (LRN) and the Centre for the Study of Conflict, Emotion and Social Justice. He currently serves as a visiting lecturer at Lviv Polytechnic University (Ukraine) and previously served as a visiting researcher at the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics, and Ethics (CAPPE) at the University of Brighton and at the Sussex Centre for Human Rights Research, University of Sussex, as well as the European University Institute (Italy), the University of Iceland, and was part of Erasmus+ teaching mobility programme for Higher Education researchers. Beyond academia, Yaar has been a member of the Israeli Bar Association since 2014. His work included petitioning the Israeli Supreme Court (HCJ) on behalf of Palestinians and advocating for their fundamental human rights, including freedom of movement, access to healthcare, and employment.

Why is no one talking about Sudan?

Hadil Kekhya & Oluwasijibomi Fola Akande



Since the emergence of the conflict between the Sudanese Army Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2023, there has been an escalation in humanitarian crises, such as famine and health crises. UAE-backed militias 'RSF' has committed human rights violations, specifically sexual violence against women. Lack of significant response from the international community raises concerns about the effectiveness of international law and its role in protecting innocent victims in war and conflict.

Hadil Kekhya (LLM Candidate, Public International Law) is passionate about exploring intersections of conflict and human rights with a focus on transitional justice implementation in post-conflict. Advocate for women’s rights with experience in empowering women and social justice. Hadil is keen on international criminal justice to address crimes such as enforced disappearance and torture, particularly in the shadow of dictatorial regimes)

Oluwasijibomi Fola Akande (LLM Candidate, International Commercial Law) is passionate about using legal expertise to make a positive impact on society. With a strong academic foundation in international law and a keen interest in areas such as intellectual property, economic law, and environmental law, she is committed to addressing global challenges. Her practical experience in arbitration, fraud examination, and leadership roles further enhances her ability to provide effective legal solutions)

The MENA Media Discourse	Dr Max Mauro
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Before returning to university to complete a PhD, Max worked for twelve years as a journalist, writer and researcher in Italy, Germany and Venezuela. In 2014, he was awarded a FIFA Research Scholarship to conduct a study on migrant youth, football and belonging, which led to the publication of the book “The Balotelli Generation. Issues of Inclusion and belonging in Italian football and society”. In 2019, he completed a follow up to his PhD ethnographic research carried out in Dublin, Ireland, and published the book “Youth sport, migration and culture. Two football teams and the changing face of Ireland”. His work has also been published in journals, including Media, Culture and Society, European Journal of Cultural Studies, Communication and Sport, Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies, Sport in Society.

Parallel to his academic work, he has published in Italian two cycling travel books (about a solo cycling trip through Patagonia, and about Berlin, the German capital) and a journalistic investigation on migration to and from Italy. He is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK). Max’s research interests encompass media and representation, the sporting spectacle and processes of racialisation; media cultures, migration and belonging.

2.30pm	The International Family Tracing Service of the British Red Cross	Rayeesa Mahomed
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Rayeesa's presentation will focus on the International Family Tracing service of the British Red Cross and her motivations. She hopes to inspire students to consider careers in the humanitarian sector as she shares her career trajectory and how she overcame challenges faced.

Rayeesa studied Arabic and Middle Eastern History at the University of Manchester, before studying a law conversion course and completing a postgraduate degree in international law. She has worked in the human rights sector and humanitarian field, including in London, Greece, and Jordan, and currently works for the British Red Cross.

3.00pm	Second Panel – MENA in the Intersectional Lens	Abier Hamidi
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Abier is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Centre of Wellbeing and Long-term Health, working on a Cancer Research UK-funded study aimed at developing videos to support the early detection of skin cancer (EDSC).

Her research interest is on the complexities of disseminating information on sensitive and taboo topics, considering the influences of culture, religion, and language. She is particularly interested in how digital media can reach marginalised communities and shape their perceptions and behaviours



Child marriage is an international human rights issue. It is pervasive in the Middle East and North African countries, where children are forced into marriage due to poverty, lack of education, customary cultural norms, gender inequality, lack of deterrence in laws and difficulties in enforcement. These forced marriages negatively affect the psychological health, physical health and sociocultural development of children. Although legal measures are being taken to stop child marriages in this region, practice and theory contradict each other, and countries are moving in a negative direction in terms of implementing norms. For this reason, it is necessary to inform the countries that have not been able to develop in the scope of stopping or preventing child marriages and to take as reference the countries and practices that have developed in this field and set a precedent. Ayşe Kayra Özdemir is a registered lawyer with the Union of Turkish Bar Associations. She is currently pursuing an LLM in public international law at Bournemouth University and is primarily interested in international criminal law and international humanitarian law.



Dr. Payam Ansari is a Lecturer in the Department of Sport and Events Management at Bournemouth University Business School. His main area of expertise lies in Sport Marketing and fan experience and engagement. He brings a unique blend of academic rigor and industry expertise, combining his experience in teaching various courses in Sport Management with practical insights. Payam is a former Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA) Research Fellow, which highlights his commitment to research excellence. He has also worked in the sport industry at a high managerial level, bringing a depth of real-world experience to his academic endeavours.

“Resistance and Protest” and/or “Negotiation and Joy”: The Journey of Iranian Women in Men’s Football Fandom

This report sheds light on the often-overlooked dynamics of women’s participation in male-dominated sports arenas like football fandom in the MENA region, with a focus on Iran. It highlights the importance of understanding MENA as a diverse region where unique cultural, social, and political factors shape women’s sports engagement differently, challenging the tendency to generalize these experiences as “resistance” to restrictive norms. This report argues that Iranian female fans’ journeys reflect not only resistance but also “negotiation” and the pursuit of personal joy. Drawing from research in 2020, the analysis challenges the oversimplified view that sees Iranian women’s engagement with football solely as resistance and protest. Instead, it illustrates how these fans’ involvement in football is driven by passion and a desire for recognition as legitimate fans, rather than a purely political stance. Additionally, it discusses how social media and globalization enable these women to connect with global sports cultures, fostering a space for organic social change beyond mere confrontation. This nuanced approach calls for a deeper understanding of the multiple forces shaping women’s sports engagement in Iran and the MENA region.



In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the role of ethnic minorities and women entrepreneurs remains underexplored, despite their immense potential to drive economic growth and innovation. This presentation examines the challenges faced by these marginalized groups and explores the transformative power of innovation and entrepreneurship in unlocking new opportunities. In light of the region's rapidly evolving economic landscape — marked by digital transformation, shifts in labor markets, and diversification efforts — empowering these communities is critical to fostering sustainable development. Drawing on insights from my studies in Innovation, Management, and Entrepreneurship, this talk will highlight key barriers such as limited access to finance, cultural biases, and insufficient networks, which hinder the growth of ethnic minority and women-led businesses in MENA. At the same time, it will emphasize the opportunities that digital technologies, social entrepreneurship, and inclusive policies offer in overcoming these obstacles. By examining successful case studies and innovative models from within MENA and other regions, this session will present actionable strategies for policymakers, business leaders, and civil society organizations to support the creation of more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems. Ultimately, the goal is to unlock the potential of underrepresented groups, driving economic and social innovation in MENA while contributing to a more equitable and diverse entrepreneurial landscape.

With roots that span both Asian and Arab cultures, Balpreet Kour embraced the role of Ethnic Minority Officer at SUBU, where she works to amplify diverse perspectives and ensure all voices are heard within our campus community. Beyond her role in student leadership, Balpreet is deeply involved in university life, volunteering as a Faculty Representative. This gives me the chance to connect with students and staff, helping shape a more collaborative and dynamic environment at BU. Balpreet is pursuing an MSc in Innovation, Management, and Entrepreneurship — a program that sparks her passion for transforming ideas into action and driving forward-thinking solutions in today's fast-paced world.