

SESSION 10 (Film)

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Facing Shores: Baloch Music on the Arabian Peninsula

Edited from footage shot during my doctoral research (conducted in Oman, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait between 2014 and 2017), this film surveys Baloch cultural life in the Eastern Arabian Peninsula through the lens of music. I contrast the roles of literary associations and patronage networks with local community rhythms and the importance of hereditary musicians habitually brought on sponsored visits from Makran, the portion of Balochistan that extends inland from the Arabian Sea/Gulf of Oman coast between Karachi and the Straits of Hormoz. Whether framed as a core site for Baloch diaspora or as an actual extension of Balochistan into the adjacent cultural space, the Arab Gulf states loom large in a greater Baloch cultural infrastructure, especially considered the threats to Baloch culture and identity poised by the internal politics and policies of Iran and Pakistan. I combine interviews with musicians, poets, and cultural activists with musical and ceremonial performances—at wedding parties, culture days and heritage celebrations, mashaira (literary salons), and spirit possession ceremonies. My aim is to convey an intimate sense of the multidimensional facets of Baloch culture that have taken hold in the affluent post-maritime coastal metropolis of the twenty-first century Gulf region and to provide a unique window on ongoing trans-Gulf circuits at a time when the tensions and geopolitical divide between both sides is particularly acute.

Bio

George Murer is a researcher and ethnographic filmmaker interested in flows of musical/poetic expressions, regional identities, and popular media across Kurdistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Balochistan, the Gulf, and the Indian Ocean region. He is currently working on a book project alongside several articles, documentaries, and teaching at Columbia University.