



## ZMO-Kolloquium Winter Term 2013/2014

### *Fuelling Societies:*

### *Energy Resources and Politics 'From Below'*

Thursday, December 12, 2013, 6 pm

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## Oil, Water, and the Writing of History in Southern Arabia

### Lecture by Mandana E. Limbert

#### Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

Mandana Limbert explores how oil and water figure in historical and temporal representations of political change in the Sultanate of Oman. In particular, she focuses on local histories, school text books, and other officially sanctioned histories to examine the ways that oil at times disappears and at times appears in accounts of Oman's political trajectory. While oil often disappears in representations of the origins of the modern state, it looms large in imaginations about the nation's future, a future in which reserves may be depleted and in which the current ruler is no longer alive. This paradox helps to glorify the wealth of the present as delinked from oil, while preserving the end of rule as entangled in the "natural" limits of oil supplies. At the same time, water – and its availability and just distribution – appears central to the rise and fall of earlier regimes, as well as their moral legitimacy. Water therefore frames historical accounts of political trajectories, whereby – for example – droughts indicate divine displeasure and the inevitable shift to a new regime, while pious reforms and management of water distribution become central to descriptions of just rule. The availability (and at times just distribution) of water not only grounds political shifts in "natural" events, but also allows, through this "naturalization," the work of divine intervention. Oil and water therefore come to define trajectories of rule over the twentieth century, albeit in distinctive and shifting forms.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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und Forschung

**Mandana E. Limbert** received her PhD in Anthropology and Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan in 2002 and joined Queens College (CUNY). Limbert is co-editor of *Timely Assets: The Politics of Resources and their Temporalities* (2008) and author of *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town* (2010). Her next book *Oman, Zanzibar, and the Politics of Becoming Arab* will discuss changing notions of Arabness in Oman and Zanzibar over the course of the twentieth century.