

MELA 2023: Relationships, Responsibility, and Care in Middle East Librarianship

The MELA 2023 Annual Meeting will be held between October 31 to November 2. Please note that registration is opened. The full programme will be shared shortly.

Meeting: At this time, the Programming Committee is planning for a hybrid conference, with in-person attendees gathering in Montreal, QC and virtual attendees joining us on Zoom. Further details about the meeting, annual dues payment and registration fees will be shared closer to the meeting.

CFP: This year, MELA is inviting proposals in the form of panels, papers, or roundtable discussions that center **relationships, responsibility, and care** in Middle East Studies Librarianship and library and information science (LIS) work.

Critical librarianship and information studies has grown as a field and increasingly become an integrated part of the LIS landscape. While area studies librarianship has not necessarily been the focus or driver of these conversations, discussions around decolonizing libraries have necessarily brought area studies librarianship more into focus. The scholarship and activities around decolonization in libraries has ranged from diversifying collections, rethinking and refining descriptive practices, and examining the origins and ethics of legacy collections and current collecting practices. The question remains, however, whether these attempts conflate diversification with decolonization, failing to grapple with the very material aspects of decolonization. Conversations around cultural heritage, including manuscripts, have examined ethics around collecting, access, and ownership, more recent scholarship has taken a more holistic look at the profession.

As area studies librarianship reckons with extractive collective practices and discussions around decolonization, there are opportunities to reflect on better practices in collecting, description, digital projects, and outreach that focus on people and communities, and resource sharing. While discussions as to what constitutes decolonization in libraries and academia at large are still ongoing,¹ ethics of care can provide helpful frameworks for Middle East LIS workers to approach their work.

Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor in their article “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives”² suggest addressing social justice concerns “from one based on individual rights to a model based on a feminist ethics of care. From the approach of a feminist ethics of care, archivists are seen as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility.” With this framework in mind, we are asking for proposals in the form of panels, papers, or roundtable discussions that

¹ Eve Turk and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1:1 (2012): 1-40, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>.

² Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," *Archivaria* 81 (2016): 23-43, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13557>.

center **relationships**, **responsibility**, and **care** in Middle East Studies Librarianship and LIS work. We also would like to expand this framework to extend to co-workers, as workers themselves are often forgotten as community members. We invite proposals that explore these themes with regards to collections, description, digital projects, user and community partnerships, as well as labor and solidarity. We also welcome proposals that might address the limits of care as a radical, transformative practice. We also encourage proposals that engage with scholarly conversations *beyond* area studies and *across* other archival and library science methodologies for inspiration in shaping the future of our field.

The following might serve as examples but topics are by no means limited to this:

Reparative (re)description

Rethinking subject analysis and authority work

Barriers to access of Middle East materials

Preservation & physical care for collections

Professional advocacy, labor conditions, and unionization

Devaluation of the profession

Community archiving projects

Partnerships that disrupt power relationships

Reciprocity and relationship building

Critical pedagogy in area studies

Collection provenance and ethics of collecting

Submission guidelines: Proposals/abstracts addressing the conference theme should be submitted by **July 31st, 2023**. We will notify people about the status of their proposal on August 31st, 2023. *For individual presentations:* Please anticipate 20 minutes' presentation time, including Q&A). *For Panel Presentations:* A limited number of one-hour panel slots are available; please consider having no more than five participants (including moderator). Include the names of all panel participants in your proposal. **For all presentations:** Please indicate if you will be attending in-person or online. PC laptop and display will be available on-site. Those demonstrating "live" websites or databases are advised to have offline slide screenshots in case of technical issues. *Accepted presentations will have ME LA registration fee waived for their presenters.* For any other program-related questions, please contact (vpresident@mela.us).