This talk presents a unique transnational perspective on the racial politics of Dubai’s smart urbanism to examine how it relies on the coupling of automation technology with a repressive labor regime, which relies on the systematic exploitation of non-citizen labor via the Kafala (sponsorship) system. Yet, it demonstrates how anti-racist and feminist mobilizations for abolishing the Kafala envision alternatives to the futurity that contemporary Gulf Futurism propels. Indeed, the two oppositional realms of cultural production – racial difference and anti-racist future – contest as much as facilitate Dubai’s growth as a logistical space. To this end, this talk compares the profit-driven, high-tech futuristic spectacles of Dubai to Beirut, an example of the war-torn and toxic cities spreading in the rest of the region, while focusing on counter-spectacles arising from both cities. Therefore, the domain of cultural politics and its accompanying aesthetic regimes comes forth as a site of political struggle for transforming the spatial and social divisions that logistical capitalism reproduces and profits off. Ultimately, the analysis to be presented affirms cultural politics in the process of being made in the streets across borders.

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Black Box Allegories of Gulf Futurism: The Irreducible Other of Logistical Capitalism

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