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**Workshop 6**

***Mapping Transnational Networks in the Middle East:  
Local Logics and Global Processes***

**directed by**

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***Workshop abstract***

While scholars of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have long considered the impact of cross border flows of people, capital, and ideas, these studies have generally used the national economy as their frame of reference while assessing the impact of these flows on national economies and policy making. More recently, these processes have been understood with reference to the notion of globalization, often suggesting that the region remains outside of global trends and market liberalization.

This workshop, in contrast, seeks to foster transnational approaches exploring how political economies of different scales (local, national, regional, and interregional) across the region are connected to and defined by discrete transnational networks and processes. Such approaches contest the notion that "global" agents and processes with universal logics, such as neoliberalism, are generating a more homogenous environment for firms and policy makers. They also expose the limits of state capacity to manage political economies at the national scale. Most critically, transnational approaches can highlight how the MENA is highly enmeshed in diverse transnational networks and processes while exploring how these are embedded in multiple "local" contexts and spaces within the region as well as outside of it.

Workshop papers will "map" diverse agents, sites, and processes of transnationalism including assorted local strategies of transnational firms, free trade zones, epistemic communities of experts and activists, economic regionalism, migrate laborers and entrepreneurs, and ethnic/national identity formation. Together these mappings will help reveal the hybrid transnational structure of forces shaping MENA political economies, the diverse local experiences of globalization, and how these impact political economies outside the region.

### *Workshop description*

Scholars of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have long considered the impact of cross border flows of people, capital, and ideas. These studies, however, have generally limited their frame of reference to the national economy and their assessment to the impact of these flows on national economies and policymaking (Chaudhry 1997, Richards and Waterbury 1998, White 2001). Such statist approaches overstate the autonomy and centrality of national economies and treat international forces as exogenous. More recently, such flows and economic policies have been understood with reference to the notion of "globalization," often viewed as an undifferentiated market-driven process that generates increasingly homogenous international economic, political, and cultural environments across the globe.

When applied to the MENA, such approaches often suggest the region remains a territorial exception to global trends and processes dominated by market liberalization (UNDP 2002, Henry and Springborg 2001, World Bank 1995). Popular commentators, moreover, often conclude that the region is detached from "globalization" and possesses a cultural proclivity to resist its processes (Barber 1997, Friedman 1999).

Whatever the cause, the notion of "Middle East exceptionalism" and the region's "disconnectedness" have increasingly been viewed by Western policymakers as limiting economic growth and sustaining political turmoil, leading to the export of threats to Western societies in the form of terrorist networks, migrant labor flows, unstable oil markets, and un-assimilated religious communities. These understandings provide the basis for calls from Western policy makers, development experts, and business elites that the region must be redesigned/transfigured in order to make it more integrated into the global economic order.

Given the long history and contemporary reality of economic interaction and interdependence between the Middle East and neighboring regions, the notion of Middle East exceptionalism is limited and misleading. Colonial legacies, the growth of the oil industry and market, forms of urbanization, infrastructure, and landscape modification, and the intense flows of people, goods, and capital across the Mediterranean and from the Persian Gulf to South Asia all belie the notion of a region of disconnected and exceptional economies (Goldberg and Vitalis, 2002 and Al-Rasheed, 2005).

Further, the last two decades have seen the implementation of various modes of liberalization to facilitate and manage flows of trade, investment, tourism, and natural resources. Meanwhile, regional policy coordination and cooperation has been fostered by the development of new initiatives such as the Euro-Mediterranean partnerships, agreements related to the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, and Gulf Cooperation Council projects. It is thus unclear to what degree economic, political, and environmental challenges result from a lack of integration or are an effect of particular policies and

forces associated with current modes of integration and economic liberalization (Moore and Schrank 2003, Mitchell 2002).

### **Policy questions and alternative answers**

In addition to challenging the notion of "Middle East exceptionalism," the workshop seeks to address a constellation of pressing policy-relevant questions: How do transnational networks and processes shape state policies towards liberalization, reform, and global integration? How do state policies in turn shape transnational processes and crossborder flows of labor/remittance flows, investment, expertise, and activism? What lessons can be drawn by comparing countries in the region (and outside) that have experienced different types and degrees of economic integration, engagement with transnational advocacy networks, and flows of labor and remittances to and from host countries? To the degree that transnational processes are differentiated and politicized, what are the political logics behind adopting diverse national policies in response to international and local pressures?

One of the goals of the workshop will be to produce analyses that suggest alternative bases for shaping policies of economic liberalization and sustainable development at the local, national, regional, and international levels.

### **Beyond globalization and Middle East exceptionalism: a transnational approach**

Rather than seeking to explain Middle East exceptionalism, this workshop is built on the notion that the connectedness of the MENA to the global economy is unrecognized and misunderstood. While comparative national political economy approaches applied to the region have tended to emphasize globally out-of-step macroeconomic characteristics (Henry and Springborg 2001), most international political economy scholars have ignored the region and its relevance to the global economy or sought to suggest that it might represent a breeding ground for resistance to Western liberal-capitalist hegemony and possibly offer a basis for an alternative order (Murden 2002, Smith 2006).

Instead, this workshop draws on approaches stressing the locally differentiated, territorially specified, and discursively constructed nature of "globalization" and neoliberal economic policies (Ferguson 2006, Ong 2006, Brenner 1999, Mitchell 2002). While appropriating concepts developed through the study of transnationalism enmeshing other regions (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Risse-Kappen 1995, Haas 1992, Rosenau 1997), we wish to explore the specific modes by which transnational networks, multinational organizations, and non-state actors have transformed the MENA, explicating the precise scope of the region's experiences with "globalization," while revealing how globalization more generally is produced, refracted, and localized. The workshop, thus, will foster what we refer to as transnational approaches that explore how communities and political economies of different scales (local, national, regional, and interregional) across the region are connected to and defined by discrete transnational networks and processes.

This approach to transnationalism implies looking beyond the typical actors of the globalization narrative, such as international funding agencies, multinational companies, and cosmopolitan elites. To understand transnationalism in MENA, one must analyze specific decisions and complex interactions by other actors, such as local economic and political elites, who use their control over regulation and investment to create enclaves, free trade zones, segmented markets, epistemic communities, "ghettoes," and cosmopolitan arenas of cultural consumption and production that spatially define the new contours of 'globalization' in the region. Equally, however, we are interested in analyses that focus upon those often seen as peripheral to shaping globalization in the region,

including popular organizations, advocacy networks, and the numerous participants in the informal economies of housing, labor, manufacturing, and commerce.

This approach challenges convergence theories of globalization, both those that depict a process improving the human condition through enhancing "choice" and "freedom" and those that view globalization as inscribing new inequalities and resulting in homogenized cultures ("McDonaldization"). It also suggests that discussions of "flows" of capital and labor that "span the globe" are better understood as networked political and economic trajectories which traverse specific nodes as well as tend to "hop over" locations and territories, skipping and congregating in particular areas and not others (Ferguson 2006, 16). Sensitive to territorial aspects of economic activity and the locally embedded nature of nodes within transnational networks, transnational approaches reveal multifaceted, uneven episodes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Hazbun 2004). Thus, depending on the particular vantage point "globalization" is experienced differently and studying it as such tells us how diverse locations, individuals, collectivities, and economies are placed or "ranked" in various hierarchies of production and cultural ordering, or what Ferguson describes as a "place-in-the world." Thus, researchers must be sensitive to the relationship between the local and global systems and neither a purely domestic or international focus is sufficient to fully understand causes and outcomes of transnationalism.

### **Potential workshop participants and papers**

Workshop papers will "map" diverse agents, sites, and processes of transnationalism focusing upon the strategies of regional and international firms, state officials, epistemic communities of experts and activists, and migrant laborers and entrepreneurs in the context of diverse and spatially uneven experiences of globalization. Together these mappings will help reveal the hybrid transnational structure of forces shaping MENA political economies and landscapes.

The workshop is designed to bring together researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including political science, sociology, geography, anthropology, history and economics. Papers may focus on the experience of a particular sector, country, locale, multinational firm, or international organization, but are expected to engage with the emerging theoretical literature on transnationalism and produce original empirical research on the Mediterranean and larger Middle East and North African region. It is expected that participants will pay particular attention the synergies and dialectics between the global and the local. Research methodologies from detailed ethnographic or historical accounts to statistical studies may be appropriate. Finally, the Middle East and North Africa is defined as the Arab speaking-world, Turkey, Israel, and Iran as well as immigrant and diaspora communities (e.g. Kurds and North Africans in Europe or Lebanese in Africa), which constitute aspects of transnational networks and flows of capital, labor, and discourses.

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## *Directors' individual paper abstracts*

### *Alternative agents of globalization: The role of transnational networks in the Middle East and North Africa*

**Waleed Hazbun**

Drawing on the work of James Rosenau and others, this paper presents an alternative framework for understanding the microfoundations of globalization in order to map networks of transnational mobility across the Middle East. This framework challenges the notion that globalization--the process of increased economic, political, and cultural interaction and integration across the globe--is driven predominantly by markets, technologies, firms, and/or neoliberal economic policies defined within the context of advanced industrialized economies. Moreover, it exposes the limits of comparative political economy approaches that use the national economy as their frame of reference to assess the impact of these flows on national economies and policy making. Instead, the paper develops a pluralist theory of globalization (or "transnational integration") in which diverse global and transnational processes are shaped by heterogeneous agents and networks operating at multiple scales (local, national, regional, and interregional). In doing so, the paper contests portrayals of the MENA as disconnected from globalization while specifying the political logics and consequences of the existing modes of integration being pursued by states and private firms in the region.

Using the example of recent shifts in patterns of tourism development, the paper shows how many of the agents and nodes of transnational flows in the MENA are not based in the "core" regions of the North Atlantic nor do these networks always easily integrate or dissolve themselves into those of the core networks and processes generally categorized as globalization. In the wake of 9/11, for example, tourism sectors across the MENA states have increasingly relied on intra-regional flows of tourists and investment, such as those generated by the oil-rich Arab gulf region. New "global" nodes have emerged in the region, such as Dubai, which ranks as one of the fastest growing tourism destinations and seeks to become a leading global air transport hub. These new patterns of regional cross-border mobility and the emergence of transnational networks across the region have been shaped by changing state policies, forms of regional cooperation, business strategies, and consumer tastes. Some tourism developers have even sought to promote forms of Islamic tourism catering to relatively untapped markets in the region. In the process, these trends are leading to a redefinition of the meaning tourism and geographic patterns of the global tourism networks.

### *Free Trade Zones and the Re-territorializing Commerce: Politics of Transnationalism in the Middle East and North Africa*

**Arang Keshavarzian**

Free Trade Zones (FTZs), along with bi-lateral and multi-lateral free trade agreements, have been championed by US policy-makers as an important mechanism in economic liberalization of the Middle East, which is assumed to be a critical step towards political liberalization, democratization, and regional peace. In the meantime, regimes and national economies as diverse as the UAE, Iran, and Tunisia have established Free Trade Zones in order to attract foreign investment, create jobs, and

encourage manufacturing and exports. While a growing number of political economists have begun to investigate the performance of these projects and contemplate if these Free Trade Zones have met their stated objectives, few have considered the political factors behind establishing these liberalized territories with commercial and financial regimes distinct from "mainlands."

This paper presents the initial findings of research on the FTZs in the UAE, Iran, and Tunisia. It focuses on the political coalitions and geo-strategic logic behind their establishment in order to understand the location and timing of these projects. Information gathered through field research and comparative analysis suggests that FTZ locations are selected based more on geostrategic and regional concerns and border disputes and as a means to extract rents from smuggling operations than on long-term economic development aspirations. Thus, rather than being driven by the combined interests of capital and manufacturing labor, FTZs projects rest on an alliance of state and military agents, cross-border traders, and transnational interests, a coalition that is not conducive to economic growth, distribution, or democratization. More generally, this analysis suggests that political leaders can at times not simply passively and reactively "mediate" the process of globalization, but through legal mechanism engineer process of reterritorialization (FTZ) and globalization.