

Questioning Social Inequality and Difference in the Arab Region

Plenary Presentations from the Second Conference
of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences



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للعلوم الاجتماعية

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First Edition: 2017

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ACSS Publications Committee: Rami Daher, Lisa Taraki, Bassam Haddad, and Mona Harb

Translation from Arabic into English: Rebecca Saab Saade

Copyediting: Cynthia Issa

ISBN: 978-9953-0-4057-8

Published in Lebanon

Arab Council for the Social Sciences
Alamuddin Building, 2nd Floor
John Kennedy Street, Ras Beirut
Beirut, Lebanon
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Preface

“Questioning Social Inequality and Difference in the Arab region,” the title of the March 2015 conference, is at the heart of the concerns that shape the work of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS). The ACSS, like many organizations, movements, and individuals across the Arab region strives to understand the conditions hindering equality and justice, and supports critical thought and analysis in the face of the increasing retrenchment of authoritarian regimes and escalating external intervention. The democratic spaces that were opened up through massive uprisings across the region, starting in 2010, have been firmly shut, either through increased state authoritarianism and repression, or through a spiraling down into violence and war. As many as ten of the twenty-two countries in the League of Arab States are in turmoil. The impacts of the conflicts, as well as the parties partaking in them, are not contained within national borders; instead, they are transnational and transregional.

An important aim of the ACSS and the social science research it promotes is to extract the region from the lens of exceptionalism through which it has been viewed for decades. This exceptionalism is compounded by culturalist explanations for a multitude of phenomena, including political authoritarianism, religious conservatism, and gender relations. Instead, the region should be placed within the context of global processes and, indeed, as central to the production of new global economic orders, irrespective of the outcomes, as well as of new global geopolitical relations and tensions.

The twenty-two countries of the region range from the resource-rich

states in the Gulf to the middle-and low-income nations across the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, the Nile Valley, and North Africa. There are many different forms in which inequality takes place across these diverse settings; the calls for justice that have emerged in these different places address specific national and local forms of oppression. Nonetheless, at the ACSS conference regional themes emerged: issues of labor, gender, class, education, and citizenship were of great interest for scholars and research. The law and judicial processes is another major research interest across the region, and so is the study of inequality through spatial, territorial and sub-national frameworks. As will be discussed below, the presentations at the plenary sessions, published herein, took up the main threads of these issues, suggesting new research directions to shed light on the ongoing transformations of the Arab region.

Implosion of a Region

The phenomenon of unequal development within states, including the unequal distribution of resources between the metropolises and the hinterlands, has been quite clear in the trajectory leading up to and in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, which began in late 2010. While the images of the hundreds of thousands of protestors congregating in the public spaces of various capital cities riveted international and national attention, the sparks that led to these massive mobilizations were, in many cases, rural and provincial. The deteriorating rural livelihoods, the depressed economies of small towns, and the effects of drought and environmental degradation are among the root causes of unrest. What turns unrest into revolution is when the cry for equality and justice echoes across class and spatial divides. Understanding the multiple causes of the movements requires taking both the provincial and the metropolitan sources of the uprisings seriously.

That said, the language of the uprisings has been remarkably similar

across the region, demanding bread, jobs, democracy, freedom, a civil state, an end to corruption, and a call for dignity—one that is individual and collective, social and cultural, political and economic, gendered and ethnic. The common language of the uprisings has shown a wonderful diversity of mixing Arabic, English, French, and other languages to introduce powerful new words into the regional vocabulary.

Academic and public attention continues to be focused on the “Arab Spring,” with conferences tackling the subject “five years after...” and “six years after...” Yet other forms and types of mobilization and protest are also deserving of our attention. In Lebanon, the protests that began to swell in July 2015—under the slogan “You Stink”—may, in hindsight, appear to be equally, if not more, transformative than the larger movements. The crisis developed around waste management in the capital city and the most developed areas of the surrounding countryside. The halting of garbage collection during the hottest days of summer 2015 and the inability—or unwillingness—of the Beirut municipality, the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Health to come up with and implement a solution led even the most cynical Lebanese to rise up in anger, seeing that their lives and health were of so little importance to the political elite.

Two months later, in September, the demonstrations and protests were further marked by an unprecedented heatwave that held the region in its grip during that month, with temperatures soaring up to 40°C in Lebanon and even higher elsewhere. This was compounded by a strange sandstorm early in the month that lasted more than three days, with particles of dust hanging in the humid air—all of this led to a suffocating context and atmosphere. Frantz Fanon’s statement, “when we revolt it’s not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe,” acquired, beyond its psychological

or symbolic meaning, a physical dimension in this context.¹

In Beirut, the “local” issue of waste management is clearly linked to the global. If any situation brings together issues of economic inequality, political corruption and environmental degradation, it is the current state of garbage collection. This toxic triad, however, obtains across the countries of the region. Classical social theory has teaches us that when relations of exploitation become transparent, resistance becomes more targeted and effective. The “You Stink” campaign reveals that people understand very well how these relations are working together against their health, wellbeing, and future. In a context where great powers, as well as states, employ a vapid language that abstracts concepts like freedom and democracy, the existence of a movement, in which “the people” demand recycling and environmentally sound waste management systems, is at once ironic and wonderfully concrete.

Another aspect of the implosion of the Arab region concerns the millions of people who have been flung out of their homes and lives by multiple and overlapping conflicts and violence. Reference to “the refugee” or “migrant crisis in Europe,” “the worst since World War II” rings rather ironically in the small country of Lebanon that has taken (according to the most conservative estimates) over a million Syrian refugees, that is, one fourth of its population. While one certainly applauds the generous response of the people of Europe, not its governmental policies—though the image of locals cheering as refugees arrive at a train station is a little bizarre, reminiscent of spectators at the finish line of a marathon, applauding the survival of the fittest so to speak—this latest wave of displacement is neither a

¹ As it did in the #BlackLivesMatter protests. See Miller, Monica. 2015. «Outlaw Humanism.” *The Humanist* 75,4: 18.

I would like to thank Laleh Khalili for reminding me of this quote of Fanon in one of her Facebook posts.

European, and nor is it, most definitely, an American crisis.

In quantitative terms, the countries that host the largest number of Syrian refugees are Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, each with more than a million documented refugees. This, of course, does not account for the undocumented refugees, or individuals and families with enough resources to settle in these countries and build themselves new lives and livelihoods. Globally, the top six countries in the world that are currently hosting refugees and/or internally displaced persons are: Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Ethiopia, and Jordan. If we list the countries according to the ratio of refugees to the overall population, Lebanon tops the list, followed by Jordan, Nauru, Turkey, Chad, Djibouti and South Sudan.²

As scholars of refugee studies well know, it is the Global South that bears the brunt of the refugee crisis both as sending and receiving countries. We also know that refugee issues are not a matter of humanitarian aid: decades of research have shown that refugees are neither helpless nor passive, rather they are active agents that struggle to make the best out of their situation and take up available economic opportunities, often turning refugee camps into centers of economic activity.

Inequality vs Difference? False Dichotomies

The essays in this publication consist of the presentations made at the plenary sessions of the 2015 conference. The keynote address by Adam Hanieh pointed to the increasing social and economic inequalities between and within countries in the region. His presentation made clear that socio-economic processes of inequality and socio-cultural markers of difference should not be analytically separated but must

² UNHCR. 2016. Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-2015.html>

be examined at multiple scales (including local, regional and global), without privileging the nation-state as the frame of analysis. Bassam Haddad's presentation picked on some of the same issues, arguing for the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and a rethinking of the field of political economy. Importantly, he stresses that understanding dynamics in any locality requires discarding the distinction between the 'first' and 'developing' worlds. This point is emphasized and deepened in Omar Dahi's contribution which focuses on the relationship between the global and regional and the ways in which regionalization is becoming increasingly significant in global capitalism. Historically, responses by the Third World and by the Global South have taken the form of seeking alternatives, both in terms of policy and ideology; however the growing economic power of some countries in the Global South may be changing this dynamic. Dahi poses an important question: "Who speaks for the Global South now?"

Maha Abdelrahman's contribution focuses on reactions and social mobilization in the face of deepening inequalities, whether national, regional or global, and presents a critical reading of the short-and long-term effectiveness of social movements. Importantly, she discusses when and how movements succeed and fail in challenging the prevailing inequalities of class, gender, and other forms of difference. The question she raises is: Do social movements build their momentum through alternative modes of organizing, or do they reproduce traditional hierarchies even as they protest other systems of power?

The contribution by Sari Hanafi and Sarah El Jamal takes up the important issue of knowledge production. How have the social sciences, especially those produced in the Arab region, addressed the processes and changes taking place? By focusing on the specific case of research on poverty and providing bibliometric as well as content analysis, Hanafi and El Jamal demonstrate that research on poverty in

the region has rarely challenged hegemonic paradigms or examined determinants of poverty; instead, the focus is on poverty alleviation. This conclusion could be generalized beyond the corpus they had examined to show that the dominant trend in social science research on the Arab world is, more often than not, inadequate to address the conceptual and empirical challenges that the changing global, regional, and national orders of inequality and difference are posing.

In this way, the ACSS conference should not only be seen as a collection of papers addressing issues of inequality and difference from different perspectives and localities, but also as a broad agenda-setting exercise.

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The conference was organized around four main axes of discussion:³

1. Forms and Dimensions of Social Inequalities

This theme discussed the multiple forms of inequalities that have existed historically across the Arab world and the ways they have changed over time. Further, it highlighted the different factors active in deepening systems of inequality and in reproducing the experience of marginalization and exclusion among different social categories and groups. A special emphasis was placed on the interplay and *intersection* between various forms of inequalities and difference such as class, gender, ethnicity, age, occupation, nationality, citizenship, disability and the rural/urban divide, among others. How have these processes been discussed publicly, and how have ideological shifts among elites and political actors played out in addressing, ignoring or negotiating inequalities and difference in society?

Specific issues raised included:

- What kinds of inequalities exist between and within Arab states? What would the region look like if mapped according to indicators of inequality?
- How and in which contexts do colonial and neo-colonial relations shape inequalities?
- How do different forms of inequality affect access to basic rights (for example, work, housing, basic services, health, education, justice)?

³ This text was produced collectively by the Conference Organizing Committee.

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- What is poverty and who counts as poor in the Arab region?
 - How do different forms of inequalities manifest themselves in the everyday experiences of different groups in society, including the poor and the marginalized, the middle classes, civil servants, young men and women among others?
 - How does the interplay of different social markers (religion, gender, age, ethnicity, etc.) deepen the experience of marginalization of certain social groups?

2. Policies and Politics of Inequalities

This theme focused on the processes, mechanisms and political economy of the production and reproduction of inequality and difference. The roles that state actors, the transnational and local capitalist class, multinational economic and development institutions, and other relevant actors were examined under this theme. Special attention was given to the continued rentierization of Arab economies and neoliberal policies, as well as the discourses and practices of Islamist political movements on inequality, whether they are in or out of power. Furthermore, the articulation between mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession and social and regional marginalization was examined. Here rural dynamics were crucial, including the consequences of impoverishment and dispossession of small farmers on local and global (national) food sovereignty, and the ways in which “export-oriented agriculture” exacerbates local social and spatial marginalization and food insecurity.

Specific issues raised included:

- What is the relationship between inequality and different forms of capitalism and financial power (global/transnational,

regional, national, local)?

- How and when do policies and political processes lead to social exclusion, disempowerment and deprivation?
- How are these processes and policies legitimized? What kind of ideologies, theories or other forms of knowledge production is invoked to justify and legitimate them?
- What role have economic policies, such as privatization, deregulation, and liberalization undertaken in the past decade, played in reducing or furthering social inequalities?
- Are new forms of the state emerging in the Arab region? Has the welfare state disappeared? What impact do decentralization, devolution of state authority, and federalism have on inequality?
- What is the role that political power plays in defending, reproducing and deepening social inequalities?
- Is there an “Arab neoliberalism”? What similarities or differences exist between the Arab world and other regions (be they structural, e.g. oil economies; cultural, e.g. pan-Arabism; or otherwise) that bear particularly on the issue of inequality and class differences?
- How has state power been used to advance neoliberal policies in the Arab world?

3. Resistance(s) to Inequalities

This theme examined the forces combatting social inequality: social movements, labor unions, political parties, NGOs, community

organizations, transnational social movement organizations, etc. This theme encouraged a historical perspective and a focus on quotidian resistance practices (non-movements), in addition to an examination of emergent forms of organization, alternative discourses and new imaginaries. Special attention was paid to new political actors, including those from such underprivileged groups as domestic workers, construction workers, farmers, slaves and so on. The nature of demands for dignity, social justice, and so on was examined in relation to social inequalities and difference.

Specific issues raised included:

- How do the ideologies of different socio-political movements and elites rationalize and promote inequality?
- To what extent have NGOs (and community organizing) been successful in addressing and dealing with social inequalities?
- Three years into the Arab Uprisings, what can we say about the role that inequality has played in popular mobilizations, and what kinds of inequalities fueled them?
- What kinds of movements have historically mobilized around the concept of inequality in the Arab region?
- What has been the role of marginalized and dispossessed rural populations and small farmers in the different forms of resistance and uprisings before and after the Arab Uprisings?
- What typologies of movements could be constructed? Is there a difference between those mobilizing around *equality* and those mobilizing around *rights*? Are there forms of resistance peculiar to the Arab region?

- What are some of the theorizations of everyday resistance that have emerged around different forms of inequality in Arab societies? Has there been a conflation of resistance, rebellion, subversion, resilience, survival, steadfastness, and adaptation in understanding the everyday practices of subordinate groups? What is the theoretical and practical value of making such distinctions?

4. Spatial Inequalities

This theme explored inequality and difference in the Arab region through a spatial lens. Some of the papers under this theme underscored how inequalities are inscribed spatially, and difference manifested through conceptions, perceptions, and experiences of space and place. What are the geographies and scales of inequality in the Arab region, and how are they produced and reproduced? What are the processes, which have been described as “the shrinking of the commons,” that have occurred in the Arab region through the diminution and privatization of public space, mobility and services, including basic infrastructural services and housing? How is this related to the expansion of militarization and securitization, the need for protecting the ruling elite from the threat of a stigmatized “other,” and/or the neoliberal objectives of expanding capital accumulation through real-estate speculation? A particularly neglected area of study is the competition between agribusiness and small farmers over agriculture resources, like land and water, and the subsequent impoverishment, dispossession and marginalization of rural populations and peasants. Poverty, social exclusion and food insecurity (at the local and family level) are among the most visible consequences of such processes.

Specific issues raised included:

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- Should the rural/urban divide be rethought in light of rampant urbanization, the restructuring of the countryside, and the political and discursive marginalization of the rural?
 - How do urban policies and projects consolidate neoliberal economies at the expense of the commons and collective rights?
 - What are the mechanisms of security and militarization in cities, towns and regions, and their impacts on dwellers' mobility and spatial practices?
 - What is happening to public spaces in cities, towns and villages, especially in terms of the frameworks regulating the collective use of the commons over time?
 - What is the impact of inequalities and policies on natural environments, resources, and landscapes, as well as their social and economic roles in the daily lives of dwellers?
 - What are the threats to the “right to the city” (housing, infrastructure, basic services, mobility, public space)?
 - What kinds of resistance, insurgencies, and interventions are emerging to counter these processes and claim back the commons and access to resources (including agricultural resources) and services?

Final Thoughts

The Second Conference of the ACSS, like all of its activities, was a collaborative effort involving many individuals from different institutions across the region and globally. To be sure, the conversations that took place during the event have had lives of their own, and we

are pleased to witness the growing networks and collaborations that arise from such an assembly. For us, the questions raised during the conference and the identified research agendas will continue to guide the work that we do at the Council in the years to come.

Seteney Shami

Director-General

Arab Council for the Social Sciences

February 6, 2017

Theorizing Inequality and Difference through a Regional Lens

- Adam Hanieh -

Numerous scholars and development institutions have pointed to the widening social and economic inequalities that have emerged over the last two decades throughout the Middle East. These inequalities loomed large during the varied paths of the recent uprisings, reflected in the political demands of the labor and social movements in the region. Yet, the experience of these inequalities differs considerably across a range of social markers, including gender, age, national and ethnic origin, as well as citizenship status.

List of Abbreviations

- Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA)
- Euro-Mediterranean Network of Players for Economic Development (ANIMA)
- Gulf Labor Markets and Migration (GLMM)
- Institute of International Finance (IIF)
- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

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This essay is divided into two parts. The first looks at the relation between the political economy of inequality and difference in the Arab world and the market-based development models that emerged in the region throughout the 1980s and continue to expand. These models—which I describe below as neoliberalism—replicate standard Developmentalism and Modernization theories: they project the harmonious, complimentary, and mutually beneficial outcomes of the normal operation of capitalist markets. I want to assert that this is a false assumption, and stress on the outcome of these policies: the emergence of profoundly uneven forms of development, closely correlated with inequality. The co-existence of growing wealth and poverty is not a paradox—but rather two sides of the same process. Though not exhaustive, this paper will examine the key political and economic aspects of this process, and reflect on what it means for how we understand inequality and difference. In the second part of the essay, I reveal the limitations of ‘methodological nationalism’—the focus on individual nation-states as self-contained and enclosed social structures, analytically distinct from the wider region and world market (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002). Characteristic of a significant number of theorizing on the region in the social sciences, methodological nationalism, I assert, hampers a full realization of “inequality” and “difference.” Instead, this paper contends that a deeper understanding of development processes requires a serious investigation of cross-border linkages within and through the region. Trends of inequality and difference need to be situated within a regional unitary, highly uneven, and linked framework of political economy. In this respect, the paper highlights the role of the Gulf States in shaping the dynamics of accumulation and power at the regional scale.

From this theoretical vantage point, the paper presents a concrete analysis of the ways in which uneven development, across a variety

of geographical scales, ineluctably shapes patterns of inequality and difference in the Middle East. The concluding section is a reflection on the possible implications of such a perspective on the future of social science research on the Arab world.

Inequality and Difference: The Neoliberal Experience

Any discussion around the development outcomes in the Middle East needs to begin by registering the ongoing reality of foreign intervention. The decades-long involvement of external powers in the region has had disastrous social consequences with which we are all too familiar. External intervention is, of course, intractably bound with the importance of the region to the global economy, including the export of oil and gas, the circulation of petrodollars, and the sale of military hardware. Therefore, geopolitical rivalries have had a profound impact on the region's development, particularly since the end of World War Two and the emergence of the United States as the principal global power. The construction of this global system has, to a large extent, rested on the domination of the Middle East, and is reflected in the continued Western support for Israel, but also, wars of aggression, including in Iraq, the establishment of military bases, and the recent expansion of drone attacks in countries such as Yemen, Libya, Mali, and Niger (ESCWA 2014, 69).

However, foreign intervention in the Arab world needs to be understood as much more than simply military aggression. One of the fundamental aspects of Western intervention, most notably the US and the European Union, has been the promotion of a set of economic policies that are inseparable from overt forms of domination. Their mechanisms include the provision of loans and the enforcement of structural adjustment programs, bilateral trade and financial agreements, and foreign aid tied to specific conditions.

These economic measures, in other words, are not distinct from the political and military side of foreign intervention in the region—rather, they work in a complementary and mutually reinforcing fashion (Hanieh 2013).

As a result of these processes, economic policies of Arab governments have shifted radically since the 1980s. Irrespective of local specificity, generally speaking these policies echo similar policies in other parts of the world through the neoliberal era (Harvey 2005, 19). They have focused on moving toward a market-based economy, which includes liberalizing ownership laws in industry, agriculture, real estate, finance and infrastructure sectors; opening up to foreign investment flows; privatizing state-owned industries; restructuring tax regimes, deregulating the labor market; and relaxing trade barriers (Hanieh 2013).¹

The claim that the private sector is the most efficient regulator of economic activities drives these neoliberal policies. According to the World Bank, not only must the private sector become the “engine of strong and sustained growth” in the Arab world (World Bank 2009, 1), but is the fundamental requirement to reduce poverty (World Bank 2006, xxi). By enlarging the sphere of human activities that are incorporated within market relations, and enabling the private sector to expand, these policies were said by international financial institutions to promise efficient and mutually beneficial social outcomes—in short, a positive-sum game.

The reality is far too different. The outcomes of this market-driven development model are as follows:²

Rural Society: One of the most important consequences has been the changes to rural society, particularly patterns of landownership and

agricultural production (Bush 2002; Zurayk 2011). To commodify the land, neoliberal policies have dismantled collective property rights, removed tenancy rights or rent ceilings, and introduced market-prices for such agricultural inputs as pesticides, water, and fertilizers. These policies aim to shift agriculture toward export-oriented production, and consolidate the interests of large agribusinesses. They have made it more difficult for farmers to survive on the land, contributing to the flows of internal and international migration. They have also led to one of the world's most unequal concentration of landowning patterns on a regional scale. In this respect, the Arab world lies just behind Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of inequality.

Employment: With the privatization of state-owned enterprises and the deregulation of labor markets, it has become easier to lay off workers and hire on short-term contracts, which has contributed to a general deterioration in living and working conditions. The official unemployment rates in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia averaged 11 percent in 2008, the highest rate of any region worldwide (IMF 2011, 39). Unemployment rates amongst the youths and women are particularly alarming in the Arab region; around 19 percent of women and 26 percent of youths were unemployed in 2011 (ESCWA 2013, 10). On a regional scale, the latter figure is one of the highest in the world. In the Mashreq subregion, over 45% of young women were unemployed in 2011, more than double the rate of young men (UNDP 2011, 41).

Labor Participation: Unemployment statistics must be considered in conjunction with participation rates. The Arab region's rates are the lowest in the world, due, in large part, to the low participation rate of women in the labor force (26 percent in 2010) (ESCWA 2013, 9). The rate of participation among young people is also extremely low; around one-third of the youth population is working or actively

seeking employment (ILO 2011, 10). One study found that around 75% of unemployed Egyptians are youth (Wahba 2010, 31). The profound marginalization of youth has deep political connotations in societies where governments are typically dominated by elderly men.

Tertiary Education: University graduates, in particular, fare poorly in Arab labor markets. Cuts to public sector employment have closed off this avenue for many young graduates, particularly women. In Jordan, for example, tertiary graduates are the second largest unemployed group (Saif and El-Rayyes 2010, 124). The rate of unemployed, university or college educated young women in Jordan was 26.1 percent in 2006, nearly three times the rate of university or college educated young men. In the same year in Egypt, university or college graduates were the largest unemployed group, and nearly 25% of all unemployed females were university or college graduates.

Informal Sector: These figures need to be placed alongside the staggering scale of informal and precarious work that characterizes most Arab labor markets. The UNDP noted in 2009 that the growth of informal work in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia was amongst the fastest in the world, between 40 to 50 percent of all nonagricultural employment (UNDP 2009, 111). In Egypt, three-quarters of the entrants to the labor market joined the informal sector from 2000–2005, up from one-fifth in the early 1970s (Wahba 2010, 34). Not only do these trends touch on the character of employment, but they also carry important implications for how urban space is utilized and the kinds of social and political movements that fill this space.

Poverty: In the past decade, 40 percent was the regional average of people living at the so-called ‘upper poverty line,’ that is, the populations lacking the means to acquire basic nutrition and essential non-food items, in Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Mauritania,

Lebanon, Egypt and Yemen (Achcar 2013, 31). The 2013 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) UN report estimates that more than 20 percent of people in the Arab region are poor, and that this figure has not changed since the 1990s (ESCWA 2013, 5). According to this figure, the Arab world is the only region of the developing world in which poverty levels remained stagnant through the 1990s and 2000s.

Stunted Growth: In addition to cuts to public sector spending, these socio-economic trends have had a deleterious impact on social conditions. Between 2000 and 2006, around one-fifth of all children in Egypt and Morocco experienced stunted growth as a result of malnutrition (UNDP 2009, 137). Across the Mashreq countries, undernourishment increased from 6.4 percent in 1991 to 10.3 percent in 2011 (ESCWA 2013, 14). Adult illiteracy rates remain strikingly high; 44 percent in Morocco, 34 percent in Egypt, and 22 percent in Tunisia are illiterate (World Bank database). Access to education is clearly marked by sharp class inequalities. According to ESCWA, “20 percent of the poorest children [in Egypt] do not enter primary school, while almost 100 percent of rich children complete upper-secondary education. Around 25 percent of poor families spend money on supplementary tuition for their children, compared to 47 percent of the richest families. The richest households spend around four times the amount of the poorest households.” (ESCWA 2013, 17).

What remains striking is the concurrence of this widespread deterioration of living standards and employment prospects with growing levels of wealth for a very small group of financial elites. The growth in standard aggregate economic indicators over the period preceding the global economic crisis of 2008 exemplifies this trend. For Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan, real GDP per capita rose anywhere between 14.7 and 23 percent between 2003 and 2008 (measured in constant 2005 \$US) (figures from World Bank database).

Between 2000 and 2008, the average annual growth in GDP per capita ranged from 3.2 to 4.2 percent across Jordan, Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia. Stock markets also boomed during this period. In Egypt, for example, the average size of a company listed on the country's stock exchange grew more than 1,100 percent from 2001 to 2007—total market capitalization rose by 700% to reach 86 percent of the GDP, up from 30 percent in 2001. In Jordan and Morocco, the size of the stock market increased by 600 percent and 500 percent respectively.

Some prominent scholars and organizations working on Arab development claim that the dual trends revealed by these (and other) statistics—growing wealth on one side, and widening poverty levels, on the other—represent a strange contradiction. ESCWA's recent comment on Egypt is a case in point; the poverty rate rose from 16.7 percent in 2000 to 21.6 percent in 2008 (according to the national poverty line), but the GDP per capita rose consistently and rapidly during this period (ESCWA 2013, 6). They describe this as a “paradox” due to simultaneous presence of “strong economic growth and more poverty” (ESCWA 2013, 6). During the intergovernmental Deauville Partnership meeting that took place in 2011 following the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings, international financial organizations and Western governments argued that these outcomes demand redoubled efforts toward liberalization and market competitiveness (Hanieh 2015). So in other words, the ‘real problem’ remains that economic changes have not gone far enough, and their effects have yet to trickle down to the wider population. The two perspectives are unanimous in their diagnoses: the simultaneous existence of growing wealth and increased marginalization is at odds with the expected outcomes of market-based development policies.³

I contend, however, that this positive-sum belief in the functioning of liberalized markets is flawed. This supposed ‘paradox’ disappears the

moment we understand that rather than promoting equilibrium and convergence, neoliberal policies tend to strengthen the position of the market's most powerful players, both nationally and globally. This has certainly been the experience across the globe in recent decades, as the polarization of wealth—rather than a harmonious, globally collective, mutual betterment—is a distinct outcome of this development. The stark inequalities in the Arab world reflect this process—a dramatic shift of wealth from poor to rich driven by neoliberal restructuring. Viewed in this manner, immiseration and accumulation are forcefully connected as the outcomes of a single process, and they need to be seen in their unity, for they are not distinct, separate, or contradictory phenomena.

Reconsidering the Regional Scale

The discussion above has largely focused on the impact of neoliberal reform on a national scale. Here, I want to shift the attention to a regional scale, demonstrating how increased inequality and unevenness also characterize the regional political economy. Before moving to the concrete discussion, however, I want to highlight the problems of methodological nationalism, an underlying framework for much of our research in the social sciences. According to Wimmer and Glick Schiller, methodological nationalism tends to confine our “analytical focus to the boundaries of the nation-state,” leading theory to “become obsessed with describing processes within nation-state boundaries as those contrasted with those outside, and ... correspondingly [losing] sight of the connection between such nationally-defined territories” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 307). Thus, methodological nationalist approaches see the nation-state as a pre-conceived and independently existing category, in which social relations are neatly bounded and self-contained. Regional and international spatial scales are simply conceptualized as the sum of these nation states.⁴

In contrast to methodological nationalism, I believe scholars concerned with the Arab world can gain much from integrating debates within geography, urban, and regional studies into analytical approaches on the region. These debates point to the importance of considering (and theorizing) the relations that exist between different spatial scales, and to view these relations as a part of the ‘national.’ Social processes striate national boundaries; for this reason, the nation-state cannot be understood as having a self-contained political economy; it is necessarily intertwined with other spatial scales. From this perspective, the relationships with these other scales are not external to the social relations existing in any particular country but a part of them. Thus, it is impossible to understand social formations, among others, without tracing the development and interpenetration of these cross-scale relations—in other words, how these relations become a part of the very nature of the nation-state proper.

In the Middle East, the political economy of the regional scale is a particularly important aspect of this multi-scalar perspective. My comments, in this regard, will focus on the role of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states within regional accumulation patterns. By no means am I implying that the Gulf is the only significant feature to understand this regional scale. There are, in fact, a range of fundamental questions that deserve greater scrutiny, including the role of Israel and its relationships with Arab states, US and EU attempts to develop regionally integrated economic networks, the involvement of such non-Arab states as Turkey and Iran in these processes, and the growing inter-regional connections between the Arab world, Africa, and South Asia. These are essential to thoroughly conceptualize regional dynamics, but for reasons of space I cannot deal with them here.

The first feature of the Gulf’s political economy that is deeply connected to the theme of this talk—but receives far too little

attention by scholars, in my opinion—is the question of temporary labor migration. Recent figures emerging from the Gulf indicate that almost half of the Gulf’s total population of 49 million is non-nationals (GLMM 2014a). The percentage of non-nationals in the labor force ranges between 56 and 82 percent of the employed population in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait, and almost 93 and 94 percent in the UAE and Qatar respectively (GLMM 2014b). Denied labor, political and civil rights, these workers are highly marginalized within GCC society; they are, however, fundamental to the Gulf’s development model.

How does the presence of these workers relate to themes of inequality and difference in the Arab world? First, they call into question our interpretation of the typical statistics on the Gulf’s economic growth, poverty levels, wage rates, and so forth. Usually, official aggregate statistics in all the GCC states do not include, or differentiate the position of the migrant workers. As in the rest of the region, but perhaps even more sharply in the Gulf, the attempt to draw general economic conclusions through these aggregate figures conceals very marked inequalities. Indeed, one fascinating project would be to attempt to recalculate some of these indicators for the Gulf, so as to include and compare migrant workers to nationals, track and explain the divergences between the two over time.

The omission of the Gulf’s migrant-worker populations from these analyses is not only a statistical problem, but a reflection of an approach that sidelines the structural role of socio-economic inequality in the reproduction of Gulf societies. This is true in many different ways. The availability of a permanent supply of temporary and ‘disposable’ workers, for example, has directly supported the growth of construction and real estate—critical sectors for many of the large business conglomerates that are active in the Gulf.

Moreover, the presence of this workforce partially explains the divergent experiences of the effects of the 2008 global economic crisis in the Gulf. Instead of the specter of growing unemployment and social dislocation faced by other countries, most notably in North Africa, the response of the Gulf, particularly Dubai, consisted of terminating, or placing projects on hold, reducing the intake of new workers, and mass deportation of existing workers. In this way, many of the effects of the crisis were spatially displaced to neighboring countries that were interlocked with the Gulf's labor markets (Hanieh 2011). Finally, as some scholars have noted (Longva 1997; Louër 2008; Khalaf 2014), this class structure has reinforced the vertical segmentation of the citizen population in the Gulf, while helping undercut the potential development of domestic labor movements.

These observations confirm the importance of thinking outside of a methodological nationalist lens. Social relations are not neatly boxed within nation-state borders. For example, what we consider the 'working class' of a given country to be, as in the Gulf, extends, in reality, across and through national borders, constantly shifting in composition. This is not only the case in the Gulf, but more and more a feature of the wider Middle East, due to the massive and multiple refugee crises we have seen over the last few years.

The other feature Gulf-related feature that is significant to the regional political economy is the growing influence of Gulf-based firms and investments throughout the Arab world. Just prior to the 2008 financial crisis, the World Bank estimated that more than one-third of total foreign investments in the Middle East came from the Gulf, a figure that exceeded North America (31%), Europe (25%), Asia (4%), and other Middle Eastern countries (3.5%) (World Bank 2009, 56). Between 2003 and 2008, more than half of all the global investments in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria came

from the Gulf (ANIMA 2009, 155). These patterns have continued even after the global crisis: from 2010 to 2012, the GCC was responsible for around one-third of all Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the top 20 origin countries to Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia.

FDI figures do not give the full picture here. For one, they do not include the considerable (and apparent) flows of aid from Gulf governments to their counterparts in recent years. They also do not necessarily incorporate the portfolio investments of Gulf companies and Sovereign Wealth Funds in regional stock markets. And, most importantly—especially from this perspective that wants to move beyond methodological nationalism—they tend to understate the ways in which other Arab capital, particularly from displaced or diasporic groups (like the Palestinian community), have become largely based within the Gulf itself. In a very important sense, these diasporic communities need to be viewed as a fraction of the Gulf’s capital itself—their main base of accumulation remains headquartered in the Gulf, and, in some cases, have received Gulf citizenship (the Hariri family is a prime example).

The consequences of the internationalization of Gulf capital is seen in various sectors throughout the Arab region, including real estate and urban infrastructure development, banking and finance, retail, logistics, telecommunications, and media. Taking Egypt as an example, corporate-level analyses of the core real estate, banking/finance and agribusiness companies reveal a heavy predominance of Gulf-based firms or Egyptian-Gulf joint ventures on the market. In the case of Palestine, these trends are even more pronounced; interlocked ownership structures of Palestinian, Gulf-based groups directly control fifteen out of the seventeen banks operating in the PA-controlled areas. A striking example of this trend is Rawabi, a city project near Ramallah

with an investment that exceeds \$1 billion. Not only is Rawabi a joint venture between the Masri family and a Qatari real estate company, but it is also the largest private sector project to ever take place in the Palestinian territories. Similar ties of ownership between Gulf-based firms and other Arab capital can be found in Jordan, Lebanon, and, increasingly, in the Maghreb countries (Hanieh 2013).⁵

These trends confirm the importance of a cross-scalar perspective to our understanding of the Arab world. They reveal, for example, the ways in which national class and state structures have become increasingly intermeshed with those of the Gulf States. Moving beyond methodological nationalism is to understand how processes of class-state formation are strongly interlinked at the national and regional scales—with regional hierarchies interiorized within, and constitutive of, national-scale processes. Seen in this manner, neoliberal reforms have not only accentuated inequalities within national borders, but have also served to strengthen the position of Gulf-based groups within the Arab world, further sharpening the hierarchies within the region as a whole.

The recent period has not only witnessed the ongoing relevance of these intra-regional hierarchies, but also their widening. According to the Institute of International Finance's most recent estimates, the net foreign assets (gross foreign assets minus external debt) of the GCC states rose from \$878 billion in 2006 to a forecast of \$2.27 trillion by the end of 2014 (IIF 2014, 32). In contrast, the net foreign assets of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco decreased from a surplus of \$11 billion in 2006 to a forecast deficit of \$46.7 billion in the same period (IIF 2014, 34). Similar trends are observed in current account balances. In 2014, the combined current accounts of the six GCC states were estimated at a total surplus of nearly \$300 billion (17% of their GDPs), more than four times the balance in 2009 (IIF

2014, 31). In the same year, the current account balances of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco were estimated at a total deficit of \$25.9 billion (-4.6% of their GDPs), compared to a deficit of 18.8 billion in 2009 (-4.3% of their GDPs) (IIF 2014, 31).

Once again, the mutually reinforcing trends—growing inequality and growing wealth—are obvious.⁶ Within the GCC, privately held wealth has grown by 17.5 percent each year from 2010 to 2014, with the total dollar amount doubling from \$1.1 trillion to \$2.2 trillion over this period (Strategy& 2015, 3). This 1-trillion-dollar increase in GCC private wealth—which does not include ‘illiquid’ assets such as real estate, business equity, or such collectibles as artworks—was largely driven by booming stock markets and rising oil prices (Strategy& 2015, 4-9). Notably, the absolute number of Gulf families considered ‘wealthy’ has also increased over this period, and now includes up to 1.6 million households across the region (Strategy& 2015, 7). Among them, between 4,400 and 5,100 Gulf families are estimated to hold more than \$500 million per household in liquid assets, and their combined total assets exceed \$700 billion (Strategy& 2015, 8). These figures are corroborated by the proportions of ‘millionaire households.’ The Boston Consulting Group reported in 2014 that six out of the top twelve spots for highest proportion of millionaire households per country went to the GCC countries in 2013; Qatar ranked number one in the world with 17.5 percent (up from 14.3 percent in 2012). The statistical omission of the Gulf’s migrant workforce is, of course, very pertinent here.

These figures reveal that our understanding of the effects of different moments of crisis, in whatever form, needs to be differentiated across the region. The 2007–2008 global food crisis and the subsequent 2008–2009 global financial crisis, impacted many Arab countries in North Africa and the Mediterranean much more severely than in the

Gulf, due, in large part, to the different ways in which these zones were integrated into the global economy and the particular structures that characterized their societies.⁷

Moreover, as the figures cited above indicate, the political and social crises that followed in 2011 have led to a widening of the regional hierarchies, rather than the opposite. The impact of the recent drop in global oil prices on this regional differentiation is not yet clear, but the potential for further downturn in the core zones of the world economy, most particularly in Europe, means that the unevenness that characterizes this regional scale remains vital to interpret the contemporary conjuncture.

Future Research Problematics

I will end this paper with a final comment on the larger significance of this analysis on future social science research on the region. In my opinion, the discussion on inequality and difference in the Arab world highlights the necessity to resituate the theoretical categories of class and capitalism in the vocabulary on social sciences on the Arab world. Fundamentally, the concept of class captures (and helps to explain) differences in social, economic, and political power; in this sense, it is an essential category for thinking through the nature and causes of inequality in the Arab world. Moving beyond such assumptions as ‘mutually beneficial’ and ‘positive-sum’ approaches to capitalist development leads to understanding and integrating the inherently conflictual and exploitative relations that underlie the operations of markets. Therefore, an important challenge for regional social science research is delineating the nature of capitalism in the Arab world, as well as the formation of class relations and the ways they continue to change.

In doing so, however, we need to avoid the abstract, economic understanding of “class.” Both universality and difference are co-constituted through the relations that exist between different forms of social oppression. Such categories as gender, age, national and ethnic origin, citizenship status, and so forth, are constituents of class as a concrete social relation. In this sense, class is not an abstract category shorn of particularity and difference—difference is essential to how we understand it. Drawing on the insights of the feminist theorist Himani Bannerji, David McNally recently noted that we need to avoid the approach that sees “different forms of social oppression as discrete and autonomous social relations [...] rather than as ‘social relations and forms [that] come into being in and through each other’” (McNally 2015, 143). This perspective emphasizes an understanding of how these relations exist and change, and, most significantly, how they are a part of such categories as class, through which we can view the world.

It would make little sense to speak of class without also acknowledging that it is simultaneously gendered as it forms. This gendering process is part of what class is—the latter concept cannot be fully understood without incorporating this relationship into its theorization.⁸ This is very clear in some of the statistics discussed above; class in the Arab world is gendered in a very particular way. The marginalization of women is expressed in the little participation in the labor force, the exclusion of female university graduates, the feminization of certain types of labor (e.g. garment sectors in Morocco and Tunisia, agriculture in much of the region). It also involves a range of different types of labor relationships (especially in the informal sector). Class is also constituted through the movement and migration of people across and within borders; thus, class is marked by differences of citizenship and residence status (as the situation in the Gulf States shows).

To these examples many more could be added, but we need to derive the following: an appreciation of difference is essential to understanding class, and all differences must be mapped concurrently and concretely to form and understand the full picture of class formation.

I have further emphasized in this paper that we need to challenge methodological nationalist approaches that view nation-states as the privileged analytical frame through which to examine social processes. In relation to the Arab world, this translates into moving beyond standard academic models that line up states according to Weberian ideal-types, including ‘authoritarian monarchies,’ ‘authoritarian republics,’ ‘rentier states,’ and ‘democratic exceptions,’ which can be examined as separate and distinct social formations. These models treat national social formation as a discrete bundle of social relations, neatly enclosed within national borders, and only impacted from outside in an external fashion.⁹ Instead, we need to see the region as a unitary whole—more than just the sum of its (national) parts—whose characteristics appear within and through the national scale.

This paper has focused on one important side to this regional totality: the growing hierarchies at the regional scale embodied in the core position of the Gulf States. Approaching the topic from a regional vantage point reveals more about the causes and characteristics of inequality and difference in the Arab world than is possible through a methodologically nationalist approach. It makes visible neoliberal processes and how they have been marked by, and shaped through, the internationalization of Gulf capital. The resulting inequalities have not only accentuated unevenness in wealth and power at the national scale, but also reinforced the position of Gulf states within the regional order. Thus, the abundant wealth in one of the region’s zones is integrally connected to the underdevelopment of others—this unevenness needs to be seen as a single, linked process that manifests in different ways

on all spatial scales. At the same time, the interiorization of Gulf-based capital (both originating in the Gulf ‘proper,’ as well as from Gulf-based diasporic groups) has become a part of the constitution of national class structures. Importantly, the Gulf’s own characteristics of class and state formation—not least the overwhelming reliance on temporary migrant labor and its pivotal position in the global economy through oil—have acted as the principal enabling factors of these hierarchies. These characteristics have led to divergent experiences of crises, and need to be viewed as an internal relation of all states in the region – not simply as features located in the Gulf itself.

This analysis does not only apply to the economic level. The increasing interpenetration of the regional and national scales is also reflected in the political arena. The Gulf States have been playing a prominent political role in the Arab world; two aspects are apparent. First, some Gulf states, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have become leading protagonists in attempts to reconstitute the state structures of previous ruling regimes (as in Egypt). Second, contradictions between Gulf States (Saudi Arabia and the UAE, on one side, and Qatar, on the other) have been displaced in and through the region. Indeed, this displacement of contradiction is further confirmation of how regional dynamics are interiorized within the formation of national state structures.

What are the implications of considering the regional scale on the future of social science research on the Arab world? As I previously mentioned, there are many other features of this regional totality that need further exploration. I raised the important fact that the regional scale is situated as a critical node of the global economy itself. This is a feature that needs further investigation, particularly in terms of the ways in which global geopolitical rivalries are reworking the Middle East’s linkages with different countries across the world. Within the wider Arab world, it is important to examine the shifting

relations with the European and North American blocs more closely, especially in light of the post-2011 context. Here, I must note that a major emphasis in both European and North American policy in the region has been the promotion of tighter regional integration, including the linkage of infrastructure, energy, and logistics networks. European and North American endeavors are closely bound with the normalization of relations with Israel (through the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, on the side of the EU, and such programs as QIZ and the MENA Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative, on the North American side). A range of other non-Arab actors also needs to be incorporated into analyses on a regional scale, including, most importantly, Iran and Turkey. As these endeavors continue to develop, they will, undoubtedly, have a profound impact on the future characteristics of the regional processes described above.

Finally, linking the question of class and methodological nationalism is the importance of reconsidering the inherent relationship between economic processes and political forms. Too often, in both academic and NGO circles, politics and economics are conceived as separate spheres. Many contemporary political debates in the region reproduce this separation, focusing on attempts to build liberal democratic structures and new constitutional models, while keeping in place the same types of economic policies that preceded 2011.¹⁰ Liberalized markets, in this approach, are seen to be apolitical and distinct from the question of political power.

Indeed, I agree with the numerous scholars who ask that we see the political and economic spheres as fused: political forms reflect and mediate economic power (Abdulrahman 2012). This explains the historical connection between authoritarianism and neoliberal reform in the region. The connection between the political and the economic is particularly important to emphasize today, as it points to the necessary

linkage between the struggle to address socio-economic inequalities and those aimed at political reform. Without a serious challenge to the vast inequalities in social-economic power—both national and regional—and the national, regional, and global class interests that benefit from this, there is little hope for changing the politics of the Arab world.

** This paper is based on the author's keynote presentation at the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) Second Biennial Conference, in Beirut, March 13-15, 2015. Many thanks to Seteney Shami, Sari Hanafi, and the staff at the ACSS for organizing this impressive event. The author would also like to thank Maha Abdelrahman, Omar Dahi, and Rafeef Ziadah for useful criticism and feedback on this paper. The usual disclaimers apply.*

ENDNOTES

¹ A full discussion of these policies is found in chapter 2.

² The following section draws upon (Hanieh 2013, 71-73); see this source for statistical references not mentioned below.

³ These trends also point to the problems with standard measures of economic development, which tend to focus on aggregate growth in indicators, such as GDP, without capturing the distributional results of this growth. Likewise, there are also problems with inequality measures, such as the Gini Coefficient, which do not capture the expenditure and income of the wealthiest households adequately. Commenting on these measurement problems, the UNDP has noted that household budget surveys “must be excluding the top 5% of income earners, a plausible assumption given the reluctance of the rich in the region to openly share information about their opulent lifestyles. If this is indeed true, then the real value of Gini must be seriously underestimated.” (UNDP 2011, 26-27).

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/HDR/UNDP->

ADCR_En-2012.pdf

⁴One of the problems of methodological nationalism is described by philosopher Bertell Ollman as an “external relations” view of reality. In this perspective—which reflects a kind of commonsense understanding of the world—reality is viewed as a collection of “logically separate and easily separable things [...] that can enter into relations with other things, but can also remain independent of them. Set apart from each other at the moment of conception, such things are also viewed as static and unchanging until something from outside interrupts their ‘peace’ and brings about a change of one kind or another” (Ollman and Badeen 2015, 3). In other words, within this view, the world around us is composed of discrete, self-contained phenomena that are connected to one another externally. Change occurs when one of these discrete phenomena impacts another. See the recent issue of *Capital & Class* 39 (Feb 2015) for a full discussion of Ollman’s alternative “internal relations” approach.

⁵The book presents an empirical discussion of these cases.

⁶Moreover, these trends point to the problems with arguments that closer regional integration along neoliberal lines would lead to a convergence and lessening of regional inequalities between countries. These arguments, based upon the dubious model of ‘flying geese’ in East Asia, are again predicated upon harmonious, positive sum assertions about the ways markets operate. For an example of a recent form of this argument from Arab scholars see ESCWA 2014. Similarly, arguments can be found in the World Bank sponsored ‘New Levant Initiative’ (see <http://beta.cmimarseille.org/>).

⁷According to ESCWA, the rise of food prices “led to a significant increase in the number of people living below the poverty line [...] from 8 percent to 13 percent in Lebanon, from 20 percent to 34 percent in Egypt, and from 34 percent to 54 percent in Yemen [...] As a result, more than half a million children in Yemen alone, and more than one million children in Somalia are now at risk of starvation” (ESCWA 2014, 67). For more information on the 2008-2009 crisis, see (Hanieh 2013).

⁸To be clear, this argument is not meant to reduce categories such as gender, national origin, and so forth to class relations. In the article cited, McNally explains: “there is no social relation of, say, race, that is not internally related to sexuality, gender and class, and therefore constituted in and through these relations. To be

sure, these different social forms can be analytically distinguished, just as they are distinguished in experience; but this should not entail the error of imagining that they actually exist as discrete ‘things’, which then enter into external contact with each other” (McNally 2015, 143).

⁹ They also often reproduce Eurocentric frameworks that seek explanations for the Arab state form in supposedly intrinsic features of Arab society (be they religious, cultural, or the nature of individual rulers).

¹⁰ In this respect, it is instructive to look at the ways in which Western governments and institutions continue to orient towards the so-called ‘transition states’—a narrow focus on political issues, encompassed in such themes as ‘voice,’ ‘accountability,’ and ‘governance’—while advocating further neoliberal economic reforms (Hanieh 2015).

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Understanding Social Movements in the Global Political Economy through a Transnational Lens

- Maha Abdelrahman -

| Commentary on Adam Hanieh’s paper titled “Theorizing Inequality and Difference through a Regional Lens” |

Introduction

Adam Hanieh’s paper offers an analysis, which shows how the global political and economic order and its policies on one hand, and the different forms of inequality on the other, are in fact two sides of the same coin. While I agree with Hanieh, I would like to elaborate his argument to highlight the complex nature of the relationship between global policies and forms of inequality as an ongoing and multi-faceted process. Such process evolves when the global neoliberal system shapes and imposes its policies of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003). These policies necessarily result in the impoverishment and

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marginalization of the vast majority of the world's population, as well as in the consolidation of various forms of inequality at the national, regional, and global levels. Inevitably, protest movements develop, fueled by the anger and indignation of the masses against the global system and the governments implementing its policies at the national level. These movements are often crushed to break their momentum and prevent them from turning into revolutionary movements, and from developing counter-hegemonic alternatives to the system. Even when the most violent repressive techniques fail, the system and its representatives quickly resort to supporting and financing counter-revolutionary alliances to prevent radical attempts at changing the accumulation and distribution system in place.

As Hanieh points out in his paper, many analysts often study the forms and characteristics of inequality through the narrow angle of “methodological nationalism” which considers the nation state, and its institutions, as the only key to understanding patterns of inequality. While the role of nation states and institutions is undeniably central to any social-political analysis, production patterns in recent decades have placed a lot of power and decision-making authority, which affects millions of lives—including labor laws, allocation of social expenditure, and conditions governing world trade—in the hands of global capital and global institutions. As a result, nation states have lost some of their ability to take sovereign decisions over economic and social policies. In the past few decades, it has become increasingly difficult to speak of social and economic problems as isolated phenomena taking place within particular countries or regions. The developmental discourse of the second half of the twentieth century, which framed poverty, unemployment, and other developmental issues as specific to the ‘Third World’, ‘developing countries’, or the ‘Global South’ has largely ignored the complex role of class in shaping power dynamics, particularly regarding the development of domestic class

and its relationship with regional and global capital. Understanding patterns of inequality and the consequent rise of social movements, therefore, necessitates situating the nation state within a wider global and regional order and analyzing protest and social movements through a transnational lens.

Social Movements in a Changing Global System

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, new waves of social movements have swept streets, factories, squares and villages across the world, from the global justice and Occupy movements to the “Arab Spring,” and from anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe to anti-corruption campaigns in Thailand, Uganda, and India. These movements grow with the force of millions of workers, small farmers, students, the unemployed, pensioners, and even small business owners. Mass mobilization among the working classes and marginalized people in both rural and urban areas erupts against brutal changes in the economic system imposed by the hegemony of neoliberal ideology. While many “Arab Spring” narratives focused on unemployment, particularly among university graduates and women, as a main trigger for the Arab uprisings, singling out this particular factor distracts us from a more in-depth analysis of the overall deteriorating living conditions of the working classes due to global economic policies.

With capital’s growing control over the production process, in the last few decades of the twentieth century, and the emergence of production patterns based on flexible arrangements, many Arab governments often had to take economic, social, and environmental decisions that made their labor market more competitive and more attractive for foreign investment at the expense of protecting their working classes. If we take Egypt as an example, there was a clear pattern of “reforms” designed to attract capital and foreign investment adopted by the

successive Mubarak governments, culminating in the “businessmen” cabinet of 2004. These reforms took the shape of a wave of privatization of publicly-owned factories and companies. In 2003, nine stock-owned companies had been sold to the private sector for a total of \$17.5 million, but this rose to fifty-nine state companies for a total of \$2.6 billion between 2005 and 2006 (Rutherford 2008). In other cases, reforms went as far as shutting down many production units under the pretext of bankruptcy, while the state imposed labor laws greatly limiting workers’ rights. Labor Law No. 12 of 2003 was such an example. The law allowed employers to fire workers and change their contracts almost at will. It also made it easier for the employer to impose short-term contracts on workers, thus making it even harder for them to have social security and pensions. Many undocumented accounts indicated that eventually it became customary for employers to require workers to sign an undated resignation letter as they signed their employment contracts, allowing them to be dismissed at any moment, and without compensation. On the other hand, most companies (91%) tended to employ fewer than five workers in total to circumvent legal obligations to provide social security and guarantees once the number exceeds five (Abdel-Fadil 2011, 22).

Due to these policies, labor conditions deteriorated dramatically in Egypt to the point where even the World Bank’s conservative estimates classified 21 percent of male workers and 44 percent of female workers as ‘vulnerable’ (World Bank 2004). These studies focus primarily on the formal sector, whereas most workers in Egypt, and other developing countries, are concentrated in the informal sector, which usually provides no social security whatsoever. In fact, the relative expansion of informal working conditions, and the subsequent lack of job security in both public and private sectors have led analysts to question the validity of traditional definitions, suggesting the use of new concepts such as “informal practices” instead, regardless of the

sector in question. Moreover, these policies and changes are not found only in developing countries or regions. The past few years have seen various trends of increasing precarious labor in industrialized societies. In the United Kingdom, for instance, there is a growing number of “zero-hour contracts” that deprive workers of their basic labor rights and the security of knowing how many hours they can expect to work.

These changes not only affect urban workers. Rural labor markets are affected as well. Since the beginning of the century, the interests of large corporations have been eroding the historical rights of small farmers, leading to the deterioration of the latter’s social conditions, and even their mass expulsion from the land. As Hanieh shows in his paper, the rural population dropped by 20 percent between 1997 and 2010 in Morocco and Tunisia. This led to the emergence of social movements similar to those in India, Mexico and other countries.

Similarly, with the looming potential threat of more impoverishment and marginalization in labor markets and the growing disillusionment with the myth of free higher education, the role of student movements in the Arab World has been on the rise. The privatization of higher education is a global phenomenon, sparking student mobilization worldwide, including countries like the United Kingdom and Chile. Following years of mobilization, the student struggle against the privatization of higher education in Chile achieved a historic victory in the face of neoliberal policies in 2015.

In spite of various efforts, gender relations remain absent from our analysis of global neoliberal policies and their impact on production and property relations. However, there are studies that focus on the plight of women—particularly breadwinners—under austerity policies. Other studies focus on the role of women in subsidizing the global economy and its austerity policies, by shouldering additional

responsibilities both at home and in the public sphere. Other studies have tried to explore the effect of these policies on men, with the rise of the “masculinity crisis.” In fact, the restructuring of the labor market increases unemployment levels especially among young men, leading to the destabilization of traditional gender roles in the family and society. These studies, however, fall short of engaging in a broader analysis that takes into account these changes and their impact on an ongoing process of the creation and reproduction of power dynamics and gender roles.

One of the most important shortcomings of this gender analysis is the absence of in-depth studies that can track and analyze gender relations within social movements taking place around the world. While there are studies that focus on the feminist movement in the context of transnational networks and local feminist movements and organizations that provide legal and material support to women, there is a dearth of studies that focus on gender dynamics within other movements, such as labor and student movements.

Female farmers, industrial workers, and civil servants have been at the forefront of these movements. They have been at the heart of the action, including in the countries of the “Arab Spring.” Narratives of these movements, however, fail to properly analyze gender dynamics with adequate detail, especially the effect of these dynamics on long-term power relations. For instance, women workers in Mahalla played an important role at the start of the strike, with their famous slogan, “Where are the men? ... Here are the women.” Women farmers were also engaged in several protest movements in the Arab world against the hegemony of international agribusiness corporations. Unfortunately, very little has been written on their role, its development, and the reactions it sparked in relation to daily work, the family, or other organizational structures.

Characteristics of Social Movements under the Global Capitalist System

The different movements mentioned so far have many properties in common, which gives them a particular identity that distinguishes them from the social movements of the twentieth century. The first prominent feature of these movements is the horizontal organizing model which lacks traditional individual leaderships. Instead, we find new organizing models based on participation and communication in which all members participate equally in organizing events, coordinating demonstrations and strikes, writing statements, and collecting signatures. Decisions are made through a consensus process that engages different opinions on the subject at hand, as opposed to centralized systems and individual leaderships. Another characteristic is organizing outside traditional opposition frameworks and institutions, like political parties, official trade unions, and similar bureaucratic organizations. This tendency is probably a reaction to the deteriorating effectiveness and growing impotence of these traditional forms of organizing, even in democratic, industrialized countries. As a result, these institutions have lost their ability to mobilize the masses as demonstrated by low participation rates in parliamentary elections and declining union membership. The situation is even worse in developing countries where unions are incapable of demanding what is best for their members due to police-state practices and, at times, the forceful infiltration of unions by state agents. There have been some exceptions to this general rule, particularly on the last point. The anti-globalization movement, for example, worked closely with workers' unions, trade unions, and even political parties. With Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, the movements developed into more centralized forms of organization at one point or another. In the Arab context, we cannot ignore the role of the General Union of Tunisian Workers in the mass

mobilization for the revolution and the protests that preceded it in previous decades.

The movements were also characterized by their ability to mobilize across different sectors of society. Their ability to establish horizontal networks, diverse organizing frameworks, and decentralized mobilization processes allowed them to circumvent the security apparatuses, create new forms of collaboration amid crackdowns. These alternative forms of social movements also have the ability to attract people who have not engaged in any kind of public work for years—if not decades—either out of disappointment with traditional forms of political opposition, or for fear of becoming targeted by security forces.

Inequality under the Global Capitalist System

As an increasing number of social movements mobilized against the spread of austerity policies in many countries around the world, institutional oppression grew as well in an attempt to put an end to these movements, limit their ability to mobilize and prevent them from developing alternatives to the prevailing system. We cannot ignore the role of police brutality in the outbreak of the uprisings first in Tunisia, then in Egypt, where the January 25, 2011 protest was organized to condemn the excessive use of violence by security forces under Mubarak. The protest took place on National Police Day, following repeated calls for the resignation of the Interior Minister, Habib al-‘Adli, since 2005, and popular campaigns denouncing torture on social media networks. It is important to note here that the security apparatuses in the Arab world before the uprising were not only used to neutralize the opposition, but also to protect the ruling classes and their interests, which are dependent on the exclusion of millions. It was not coincidental that the budget for the Egyptian Interior Ministry

exceeded the sum total of the budgets for the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education combined. This took place in the wake of the wave of economic “reforms” that included the privatization of state-owned companies and factories, the liberalization of farmland rent laws, and the restructuring of taxes for the benefit of the wealthy (Seif el-Dawla 2009). In addition to the increase in budget, the police were granted more privileges under the country’s emergency law. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior turned a blind eye to the security forces’ increasing use of torture in prisons, detention centers, and in the streets, which eventually helped mobilize the masses, activists and non-activists, against the regime, as was in the famous case of Khaled Said.

It would be naïve for political analysts to look at the increasing role of security forces in the past few decades as limited to repressive governments in some countries of the Arab world and the Global South. In fact, this role is correlated with the rise of neoliberal ‘reforms’ around the world, including in “democratic” western countries. Examples of this trend include the counter-terrorism strategy, PREVENT, in the United Kingdom and the Patriotic Act in the United States. Such legislation gives security forces in these countries more leverage to crack down on groups, such as the unemployed, migrants, and the homeless. Simultaneously, security forces protect the rich, and their economic interests and consumer lifestyles in their affluent neighborhoods and gated communities.

Challenges Facing Social Movements

So far, I have emphasized the importance of studying social movements and their emergence in parallel to increasing inequalities, as part of a global, trans-national phenomenon with commonalities that cut across local specificities in each country. Now I reflect on

the challenges facing these movements and their struggle to put forth an alternative vision against the hegemonic global system. As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, understanding social movements as a popular reaction against growing inequalities is part of an ongoing process in which global institutions—with the support of their national partners—work to stifle any revolutionary movement that aims to change power relations and ownership patterns. As soon as any resistance movement develops against this hegemony, the different institutions come together to mobilize financially, politically, and militarily to initiate counter-revolutions to defeat them. Recent Arab uprisings, especially that in Egypt, illustrate the capability of Gulf capital to support a military regime, thwart every revolutionary demand from greater freedom to social justice, and prevent the uprising from spilling outside its geographic borders.

In this regard, we can focus on challenges that take place on two different levels.

- 1) First, these movements—characterized by mass mobilization—struggle to confront traditional institutions and systems. I am not only talking about the security forces, but also traditional political parties, as well as legislative and executive apparatuses, which work to derail these movements and constrain them within conventional mechanisms for political action. Trying to channel the various social movements' demands for change exclusively through the narrow funnel of parliamentary elections clearly illustrates this point. The electoral process itself requires a specific mobilization and organizing capacity that may not be common among activists and those involved in alternative forms of social change movements. Activists, in Egypt for example, have, in fact, repeatedly distanced themselves from

political parties and traditional forms of political opposition; so much so that one cannot help but wonder how they will be able to compete in such an environment, if their political experiences are formed elsewhere. The Egyptian model showcases this dilemma perfectly, as many revolutionary figures could not compete in the post-Mubarak elections. The latter, in fact, were managed in a way to allow other players to take over the government and the state apparatus. Even when revolutionary forces manage to produce political parties and secure electoral achievements, the dynamics and negotiations with international and regional social-political forces remain a challenge. Syriza's fight against the austerity plan imposed on Greece is a telling example.

- 2) The second level relates to the ability of these movements to formulate viable alternatives for political and social involvement which would be based on a participatory, democratic approach. As I have mentioned before, one of the main characteristics of these social movements is their insistence on the need to develop alternatives to the current system, not just in terms of programs and theory, but most importantly, in terms of organizing and coordinating activities. In fact, many activists strongly believe that politics and democracy should not be limited to certain institutions. They believe their primary role is to create alternative frameworks and spheres in which to work. Indeed, many movements, such as the 'anti-globalization movement', the Occupy movement, the Kefaya movement, and similar movements in the Arab world, insist on the necessity of organizing in decentralized, participatory frameworks, as opposed to building traditional, hierarchal networks that focus primarily on formal decision-making processes. Eventually, these movements succeeded

in creating innovative forms of collective work, and many of those involved have produced valuable documentations of their experiences in this regard.

However, the future of these movements is at issue, not only in terms of their sustainability and development under the current global system, but also in terms of their ability to create mechanisms that deconstruct—if not put an end to—internal power dynamics, and present a sustainable model for democratic organizing. Perhaps, the hardest power-dynamic pattern to question and break is the one based on gender relations. The question here is: How have these movements contributed to shifting gender power dynamics beyond the moment of uprising? Did we witness a reconfiguration of power dynamics? Or did they return to their earlier patterns in less revolutionary times? In the end, the dilemma remains whether these movements have the capacity to confront social inequality in society as a whole, while breaking forms of social inequality within their circumscribed spheres of political work.

** This commentary is an edited translation of the Arabic text that was published in the Arabic version of the publication of the same title.*

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Regionalization, Production, and Ideology in the Global Economy

- Omar Dahi -

| Commentary on Adam Hanieh’s paper titled “Theorizing Inequality
and Difference through a Regional Lens” |

I would like to raise two main points inspired by Adam Hanieh’s keynote; the first one is about production, and the second is about economic theory and ideology. The section on production addresses two processes of global economy: regionalization and production. The main feature of the global economy in the last twenty-five years has been the growing economic links between countries of the Global South. This development was particularly remarkable, as it happened in the context of a North-South liberalization of policy and trade (United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) 2005). South-South trade of industrial products has grown at an annual rate of 18.3 percent between 1970 and 2003; that is twice the growth of the total

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global export and the total North-North trade. In 2003, industrial products accounted for two-thirds of exports between Global South countries, compared to 25 percent in 1965 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 2005). Similarly, the Global South's share of global exports for industrial products increased from 5 percent, in 1978, to 36 percent, in 2005, while the export of industrial products between Global South countries reached 16 percent, rising from 2 percent for the same period (UN Comtrade: International Trade Statistics Database 2014).

Simultaneously, the number of free trade agreements increased significantly in the nineties. Between 1990 and 2010, 197 preferential trade agreements were drafted (accounting for 32 percent of world trade), which surpasses the total number of preferential trade agreements signed during the previous fifty years, which totaled twenty-three agreements (Medvedev 2010; World Trade Organization (WTO) 2011). The number of such agreements signed between Global South countries has been on the rise as well, reaching a total of 110 during the same period, compared to seventy-eight North-South agreements, and nine between Global North countries.

A similar trend can be seen in financial relations between developing countries. The flow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from developing countries increased significantly, amounting to \$482 billion, which accounts for more than 35 percent of the global flow in 2012. This is a significant increase from 1990, when it only accounted for 5 percent of the global flow. Equally impressive was the fact that, for the first time, China outperformed Japan in terms of FDI flows. In addition, developing countries attracted 58 percent of foreign direct investment flows in 2012, amounting to \$790 billion, a significant increase from \$35 billion in 1990, which accounted for 17 percent of global flows that year (UNCTAD 2013). In 2012, developing countries occupied

four of the top five spots in FDI, and seven of the top twenty investing countries (UNCTAD 2013).

International development organizations considered that these changes were positive developments. The 2013 Human Development Report, *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World* is but an example of this trend. It argues that the rise of the Global South and the development of South-South relations indicate substantial improvements in human development in the Global South. These have been the positive aspects of development. However, a handful of countries still dominate the market. In fact, less than thirty countries dominate 80 percent or more of the global trade of industrial products. It comes as no surprise that it is predominantly centered in East and South-East Asia (more than 60 percent), followed remotely by Latin America, then Sub-Sahara and North Africa. These trends lead to two main observations. First, in the rising Global South, some South countries are rising faster than others. Second, and more importantly, the rise of some Global South countries is taking place to the detriment of others.

At this juncture, I would like to underline the second process in my first point, which relates to a phenomenon that coincides with the increase in regional complementarity within the Global South, including the Arab region, and that economist Dani Rodrik (2015) calls “premature deindustrialization.” The halt of industrialization in many developed countries points to a simultaneous process of a crumbling industrial sector and a rising service sector. Manufacturing had been the key to rapid economic growth since the Industrial Revolution. Countries that followed and overtook Britain economically, like Germany, the USA and Japan, did so by developing manufacturing industries. After World War II, we noticed two waves of rapid economic convergence; the first among European countries starting in the fifties, and the second among

East Asian countries starting in the sixties. However, manufacturing is no longer what it used to be; it requires more capital and skills, while the market's ability to absorb large numbers of workers declined.

While the global supply chain allowed manufacturing industries to take off, it curtailed possible profits in terms of the added value generated and kept in the same country. Several traditional industries, like textile and steel, may suffer due to a shrinking global market, and run the risk of not selling all they produce. China's success caused one negative outcome: other countries are facing a greater difficulty in selling their manufactured products. Consequently, developing countries have become more dependent on the service economy, but with a significantly smaller income than richer countries. This is Rodrik's "premature deindustrialization." To illustrate this point, he takes Brazil and India as examples of countries considered to have been economically successful in the past decade. In Brazil, employment in industry had hardly increased between 1950 and 1980, rising a meager 3 percent from 12 to 15 percent of the total employment. Since the late eighties, Brazil has in effect been in deindustrialization, a process that the small growth did little to stop or reverse. In India, employment in industry dropped to 13 percent in 2002, and has not stopped decreasing since then (Rodrik 2015).

On the economic level, it is clear that premature deindustrialization slows growth and hampers efforts to bridge the gap between less and more developed economies. Is it possible for the service and information economy to act as a manufacturing economy? The answer is no. In fact, there are two major differences between a service economy and an industrial economy: first, even though some service sectors may be compatible with commercial trade models, they nonetheless employ professionals with very specific skills, therefore, very few ordinary employees. As a result, their

employment rates are low. Moreover, the productivity rates of the banking, finance, monetary, insurance, and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sectors are high, but the total number of working hours they accommodate and their employment rates are limited in general. As a result, despite its success, the ICT sector played no major role in the economic growth. By 2015, two decades into the ICT boom, the informal work sector constituted 90 percent of India's economy, and official estimates indicated that 250,000 farmers committed suicide over the past twenty years due to the liberalization of agricultural trade (Ghosh 2005). To summarize the first point, since 2011, the Arab region has been facing a global economy, in which regionalization is gradually becoming more and more important. Some regions, however, are growing faster and to the detriment of others. We are also witnessing the deterioration of the traditional driving force behind industrial growth.

The second point I would like to raise concerns economic theory and ideology. In the introduction to his book, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*, Peter Evans wrote, "neoliberalism has failed, but what could replace it?" He asked this question back in 1995, before or during the crises that took place in Mexico (1994-1995), Turkey (1994; 1995), Argentina (1995; 2001), Russia (1998), South-East Asia (1997-1998), Brazil (1999), and, of course, before the global financial crisis in 2007. In addition, several countries continued, throughout the nineties and in the first decade of the third millennium, to opt for liberal policies, and worked to attract foreign investments at a growing rate. In fact, out of 271 legal amendments in 102 countries, 87 percent aimed to facilitate the introduction and operation of international corporations. In sixty-four of these countries, the average number of legal amendments was 154 per year between 1991 and 2004; 93 percent of which were favorable for direct foreign investment (UNCTAD

2005; Demir 2007). As Paul Amar wrote in his book *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism*, “the end of neo-liberalism has been declared over and over again in the course of one generation” (Amar 2013).

The most recent “end of neoliberalism,” or the straw that broke the camel's back, was announced in the wake of the global financial crisis that began in 2007, and continued until 2009. Many researchers and critics, whether from the left or the mainstream, took turns declaring the downfall of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, however, did not fall. In the end, it actually prevailed. This has been, however, the case in the Global North specifically, where there is a sentiment that the middle classes need to be targeted, or more accurately, they need to be tricked into believing in the utopia of the market economy and the viciousness of government intervention, which limits corporate greed. In the Global South, however, particularly in the Arab world, a different set of ideological justifications is in place, and very little effort is put into justifying the economic policies imposed.

The Global South has not always been so ideologically passive. In the wake of World War II, and following several conferences held in Bandung, Cairo, and Belgrade, the rise of the “Third World Movement” promised to give the Global South a greater voice, whereby Nasserite Egypt would take on a leading role. The Third World Movement was sparked by a wave of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements, and gave hope for South-South collaborations, self-sufficiency, and a greater voice for the Global South within international forums. The movement also expressed the aspirations of popular movements in the Global South for equality and dignity, and a call for prudence in the face of the nuclear policy of superpowers around the world.

Whether by organizing its own summits, forming the non-aligned movement, or attending the United Nations General Assembly, the Third World Movement offered a fundamental critique of the global economy, the policies of the great powers, and militarism. The Movement tried to present such alternatives as the “New International Economic Order” revealed in Algeria in the 1970s, at a time when the economic power and influence of many Global South countries was on the rise. The Movement also attempted to democratize multinational corporations, institutionalize price control for commodities, as well as import technologies and boost industrial growth in the Global South. The end of the Third World Movement was not only caused by the debt crisis of the eighties and the negative reaction of North America and Western Europe. But, the World Trade Organization steered the global economy in the opposite direction.

This is not to say that the Third World Movement was not without flaws. In fact, many, if not most, of its leaders were dictators who dismissed the farmers, workers, and popular movements that brought them into power in the first place. They also developed top-down models for economic development, giving little to no attention to the human cost they entailed. Although the Third World Movement challenged the global economy on several levels, it often agreed with many of its fundamental assumptions on development and progress, especially in relation to the theory of modernity. Still, the Third World Movement managed to create a sense of solidarity and shared destiny with the Global South. Eventually, and despite significant progress at the economic level, the striking lack of capital and strong economic foundations became a barrier to forging significant economic relations between countries of the Global South. In other words, the intentions were in the right place, but the Global South was in no position to deliver. Nowadays, the situation is fundamentally different. The rise of several countries from the Global South resulted in a competition

between the group of the five major emerging national economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) on one hand, and the post-World War II economic giants, namely North America, the European Union, and Japan, on the other hand. However, now that such Global South countries as the BRICS group are in a position to deliver, their policies indicate that they are more interested in increasing their political and economic power, rather than push for economic and political democracy at the global level.

So who is speaking for the Global South now? Perhaps we can examine the “successful” Turkish model for ideological inspiration. In Turkey, over 80 percent of the proceeds of privatization since 1985, or \$42 billion, were made specifically under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) between 2003 and 2010. Due to extensive privatization and reduction in the labor force, employment in the public sector decreased significantly, despite an increase in the country’s population from 67 million in 2002 to 74 million in 2010. Since its rise to power in 2002, the JDP government pushed for more “liberalization” and “flexibility” in the labor market. On various occasions, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ministers made it clear that they are fully in agreement with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on the supposed costs of the labor market. As a result, the JDP passed a number of laws that increased the flexibility of the labor market and undermined the bargaining power of organized labor in Turkey. The JDP also passed a more liberalizing law, which increased restrictions on collective bargaining and reduced employment in the public sector, while simultaneously increasing the percentage of sub-contractors.

Behind the Third World’s failures lies a political crisis. In the case of the Arab world, for instance, there are no mass movements that could

put forth ideological alternatives, in light of how the “concept of dependence” was the theoretical base for the aforementioned Third World Movement. Currently, there is also no intellectual movement that addresses the needs of the present juncture because of a lack of new ideas to begin with.

There is a crisis in economic thought that is closely related to the ideological question. Unlike the Great Depression of the thirties, which saw the rise of Keynesian thought (related to John Maynard Keynes), the economic crisis of 2007–2009 did not lead to the emergence of a new economic thought, even though mainstream economic thought lost its credibility completely. At the academic level, economics continues to drift away from its main course. Theories and conclusions made by economists are often accepted without any significant criticism or scrutiny by scholars working in other fields in the social sciences. As one writer put it, “economists are at a stage where the Copernican Revolution has taken place but one is still forced to resort to Ptolemaic cosmology in their political advice for decades to come” (Mirowski 2013).

I would like to end my intervention with a quote by the Pakistani revolutionary thinker and journalist, Eqbal Ahmad, which I find particularly relevant to the Arab world nowadays. It is drawn from an article titled “The Neofascist State: Notes on the Pathology of Power in the Third World”, published in 1981 in the *Arab Studies Quarterly* under a section he titled “A ‘Model’ of Development:”

“Closely related to the idea of national security are the ideologically rigged notions of ‘development’ and ‘modernization.’ Typically, the neo-fascist state is deeply committed to economic development; we might even describe this neofascism as

‘developmental fascism.’ It views ‘development’ in terms of rates of growth. ‘Growth’ involves the concentration of wealth and of power, for both are necessary to the required rate of capital formation. Thus profit = investment = growth = power. The preferred development model favors a return to the ‘free market.’ But the return is always selective: it does not involve curtailment of monopoly power or of untrammelled investment incentives; it does not entail strict controls over wages, labor unions, and prohibition of strikes. A cheap labor force is offered as a primary incentive to capital; the internal market does not expand except for luxury goods. The economy becomes increasingly export-oriented; raw-materials, including fancy food products, become the primary export items. Income inequality multiplies. Any resistance to corporate and foreign interests is treated ipso facto as a police problem; anyone questioning this model of development is viewed as a subversive, a terrorist.”

** This commentary is an edited translation of the Arabic text that was published in the Arabic version of the publication of the same title.*

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Toward an Agenda for Critical Knowledge Production in Political Economy

- Bassam Haddad -

Contributing to a new agenda of any sort requires taking stock of what has transpired. Now, more than ever, we are faced with challenges around the world that require a more extensive engagement with political economy approaches and frameworks to make sense of what we are observing. But also to potentially offer more socially just, if not radical, alternatives commensurate with existing capacities, as we face tremendous inequalities and formidable mechanisms of exploitation to which most of us, wittingly or unintentionally contribute. Though many readers might support such a move, the terrain is not as clear; neither is the terminology interpreted similarly across the board. In light of this, I would like to make a modest contribution toward the beginnings of a developing agenda for critical knowledge production in Political Economy.

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Starting Caveats

I will start with three caveats that address the cautionary notions above. First, this attempt is neither a history of political economy, nor is it about a totally new political economy agenda. To say or do so would be to ignore the impressive compendium of scholarship in this field over the past decades, notwithstanding fluctuations in quantity and quality of production. Instead, it is a deliberate renewal of similar attempts under different circumstances and with various tools available. Second, this is not about putting forth an abridged or a selective version of reality that pretends to explain the totality of reality—which would be, ironically, doing within the field of political economy what we accuse liberal social scientists and writers of doing, which is separating politics from economics. Many of us take the part for the whole, perhaps unintentionally, when theorizing political economy. Being conscious of the parameters of what one is trying to accomplish and the space it occupies within a larger universe is a pivotal criterion for its success. Political economy approaches, of all varieties, do not exhaust the interpretation of the world that we inhabit. Finally, this is mainly about the context of knowledge production on topics related to inequality. It is also a deliberately focused, not comprehensive, discussion on what needs to be a part of any critical political economy approach that aims to produce knowledge.

A Selective Overview

Looking back, we can witness the ebbs and flows of adopting political economy approaches, usually in response to political realities, with their accompanying economic and social realities. I will have to select a particular point of departure, lest this become an essay on the history of political economy. In the late 1960s and 1970s we witnessed the proliferation of critical political economy approaches, usually but

not exclusively, as a way to explain underdevelopment by relating it to development in the “first” world. These approaches moved away from Liberal Modernization Theory, which pinned the shortcomings of newly independent countries on lack of modernization, and used early developers, from the European Continent, as an ahistorical model. This literature and its accompanying efforts attempted to switch the debate by connecting the underdevelopment of one set of countries to the development of other ones. Irrespective of whether the issue was well addressed or not, this broader literature was soon overshadowed by the rising neoliberalist expansion in the 1980s, which took Chile as an experimental drawing board; then transferred the experiment to the UK under Thatcherism, and soon after to the United States in what is called Reaganomics. For a while, it seemed that trickle-down economics won the day, empirically, if not analytically. After all, those advocating critical alternatives in political economy were naturally distanced from power and policy. Worse yet, they were always unfairly connected to unsuccessful or maligned “leftist” experiments and models in various parts of the world, not least the then-about-to-crumble Soviet Union.

One takeaway from this period was the importance of highlighting important junctures, notably in Middle East Studies, such as the challenges of post-colonial development. Such challenges spoke of a more systemic and structural set of limitations that hampered or framed progress, often with a strong dose of external politics playing a debilitating role. The 1950s were replete with efforts by former colonizers to retain control in the region, with the Baghdad Pact being a representative example revealing Britain’s continuing interests and efforts in doing so. Notably, much of the resulting political forms from that period extended to what can be considered as the contemporary times (the 1990s and beyond). Focusing on factors that often take effect gradually and invisibly over a long period of time continued

to be a practice of serious political economists, who went beyond the snap-shot view to address inequality and exploitation.

Nonetheless, the 1980s, or its precursor, depending on the case(s) involved, was the decade of a shift toward neoliberalism. Henceforth, we witnessed a marked decline in the adoption of political economy frameworks, exacerbated by the collapse of the USSR—so much so that one of the textual staples of political economy, Alan Richard and John Waterbury’s *The Political Economy of the Middle East*, removed the concept of class from its framework in its second print in 1996.

Instead, much of the 1990s witnessed the domination of civil society and transition literature, reflecting liberal models of development that prioritized politics proper, with emphasis on one of the requirements for a developing democratic polity: a robust civil society. The main shortcoming of this literature was not its irrelevance, but rather, its abridged view of reality that separated politics from economics, and contented with pursuing another abridged version of the latter. More critically, the literature made little distinction between two types of civil society associations: those that might produce the reverse effect on the development of democracy, and those that empower the majority of the people. Thus, business associations led by businessmen who have strong ties to the political elites of autocratic regimes were also viewed as conducive to the resistance against state tyranny. Yet, in fact, many such individuals, and their institutional expressions (associations, chambers, etc.), were working with incumbent regimes to reproduce a system, from which they mutually benefit.

The significance of this period for the matter at hand is precisely the dearth, if not absence, of political-economic considerations, rendering the new “transitions” (to Democracy) approaches ephemeral, floating in the realm of wishful thinking at the expense

of those subjugated by enduring structures and relations of power underneath. Almost entirely, the misplaced optimism that the Arab region/countries are joining the rest of the world in transitioning to democracy in the 1990s—themselves suspect words—had collapsed by the end of the decade.

Renewed interest in political economy, at least in the mainstream, seemingly began in the last few years, but in reality, it started much earlier, right around the time when the volume of literature on liberalization, democracy, and similar subjects appeared increasingly divorced from reality in two ways: First, in terms of the subject matter itself, where liberalization was harder to spot in entrenched regimes; second, and relatedly, in terms of the arguments and conclusions that did not seem to accord with the actual trend of broadening and consolidating dictatorship and forms of crony capitalism in much of the region.

A word on the remaining literature from the 1990s is in order. That literature was associated with two others: the first is transitology, or the ‘waves of transitions to democracy’ (which kept missing the Middle East on the problematic assumption that the region was inhospitable to democracy), and the second is a whole body that examined, to no avail, linkages between political and economic reform. The latter was greatly inspired by what is known as the Washington Consensus, and its various correctives, which insist on a distinction between the prescription and the implementation, as though failures were primarily due to the latter, and such problems came as a surprise. This merits a more thorough discussion elsewhere, but suffice it to say here that the highlighted causes by Washington Consensus proponents for the failure or derailment of neoliberal reforms—including corruption, cronyism, mismanagement, etc.—were plainly apparent beforehand given the authoritarian regimes’ hold on most

economic levers. For instance, the ex post facto argument—that the support provided to regimes by International Financial Institutions was mismanaged by these regimes and vetted out based on networks and mechanisms of corruption and rentierism—was an expected outcome at the time of signing any such agreements with entrenched authoritarian regimes in the content of crony capitalism. Something about the “lessons learned” and often surprise after the fact seems disingenuous. Alternatively, it either simply affirms the argument that the intended outcome was mainly opening markets to imports, or highlights the apolitical nature of liberal political economy discourse that could not anticipate, well, politics.

In response, beginning in the late 1990s, several efforts attempted to explain the divergence from expected trajectories, or at least from hopeful trajectories that emanated from a patently liberal understanding of the causes and remedies of the problem. Echoing, in an odd way, some of the trappings of modernization theory, but with a language that was often (not always) more sophisticated, and less culturalist at face value. Thus, in keeping with the liberal thinking that informed Modernization Theory and was effectively debunked by Samuel Huntington in *Political Order in Changing Societies*, a good deal of the literature had assumed that all good things go together, replicating the unwitting “la-la land” that jettisoned structure, agency, and the strategic context.

In any case, those corrective attempts began to bear fruit in terms of research and publications in the 2000s. Two events, or, for the sake of precision, one process and one event, produced the context that sustained, deepened, and reproduced the status quo. One is associated with the post-2001 period, when the war on terrorism was in full bloom, giving regional dictators the excuse, sometimes *carte blanche*, to speed up the process of de-liberalization that started in and around

the late 1990s. Even the United States and Syria openly collaborated to root out what is called terrorism. In effect, the US war on terror prolonged the life and health of dictatorships, and sped up the process of neoliberal reforms in marked ways across the board, even in Syria. There, neoliberal reforms were adopted without external pressure or conditionality, a reflection of the mutual interests between economic elites everywhere, including authoritarian regime elites and cronies.

The second factor that prolonged the lives of dictatorships and neoliberal reforms, in various degrees, is the invasion of Iraq, known in the United States as the innocuous “Iraq War.” The savage destruction of Iraq on fraudulent grounds, and the subsequent chaos, violence, and destitution that Iraq and Iraqis continue to experience, has served to give pause to various anti-regimes efforts in the neighborhood, or at least to temporarily view the regimes as less unfavorable, or less repulsive, for a sizable segment of the population.

In fact, the years between 2003 through the beginning of 2011 saw a dramatic increase in the speed, depth, and seeming dominance of neoliberal reforms. I am not attempting to make a causal inference that links these reforms (or other political processes that were taking place in the region) to the emergence of the Arab uprisings, but I am affirming the pervasiveness of such socially polarizing and politically disempowering reforms in the lead up to 2011. Any further claims, in my view, would have to be made on a case-by-case basis, and would have to go beyond the existence of broad inequality and massive discontent as the only causes for the uprisings.

In all cases, it is no surprise that we saw, in those same years, a revitalized return to political economy, with even more impetus, if only in some circles, since the Arab uprising years. There is a need to go beyond “agency,” though without jettisoning it: in other words,

there needs to be far more focus on structure, but without ignoring agency and strategic variables. In fact, it was the scant emphasis on structural variables such as class and capitalism that brought about the surprise we witnessed when countries like Tunisia and Egypt, touted by the World Bank and IMF as models, led the pack in experiencing mass social uprisings not unrelated to the alleged neoliberal success.

Delimiting Ambition

There is no time, nor space to set a full agenda here, but there are two issues I wish to raise. First, we have much to consider in rethinking the need for bringing back political economy through the front door, and there is a point at which the commonality among Middle Eastern or Arab cases ceases to provide the base for a robust framework. Second, in the field of political economy, there is no ‘oneness’ or a monolithic agenda in the strict sense. A political scientist and an anthropologist might approach the project of building an agenda differently. The concerns of various researchers in terms of topics are quite diverse. But that is not to say that a broad interdisciplinary and analytical framework cannot be established. Rather, such an endeavor requires a more profound and collective effort that might take different forms. One example is the ongoing Political Economy Project (www.PoliticalEconomyProject.org), carried out by the Arab Studies Institute (www.ArabStudiesInstitute.org)

Therefore, I will focus on what proponents of a critical political economy might consider to be some of the basics that constitute a starting point on the question of “economic reform,” or “development” more broadly. Even if the angles or approaches of different analysts vary depending on the weight of variables and specifics in each case, there exists a dominant approach against which several of the insights

below are posited. In the final analyses, the emphasis here is placed on mechanisms of exploitation and difference that we may consider to be the drivers of inequality and social polarization.

Some Caveats, Again

I would like to start by addressing a few caveats to consider in our contribution to the development of an agenda for political economic analysis in the context of change. These caveats are more like lessons I learned by reading through the mainstream literature on the politics of economic reform in preparation for, and while writing my dissertation, then my first book. I'm including empirical, methodological, and conceptual caveats, guides, or cautionary notes.

Avoid causal reductionism (Monism): We cannot reduce everything to political economy to explain or understand the myriad aspects of social life. For instance, while many of us assert the disproportional, or structuring, influence of concepts like class and the relations of production, we should not assume that all observable phenomena can be reduced to these factors and processes. Much can be gleaned from post-Marxist analyses that attempted to develop Marxian perspectives and complimentary frameworks, from Antonio Gramsci all the way through the various strands of independent Marxists like Hanna Batatu. Understanding the interplay between material and non-material variables (irrespective of how one might delineate the boundary between the two realms), and recognizing both the direct and indirect influence of ideational and ideological, strategic, and cultural factors can only enhance any political economy framework without diminishing its tenor.

Understand the linkages you may not see from your disciplinary or paradigmatic vantage point: These include ethnicity,

nationalism, gender, sectarianism, regionalism, environmental factors, geography and space, belief, and, finally, the strategic context. Often, many of us, including this iteration, can be unintentionally wrapped up in one's discipline, paradigm, and topic, without much regard to the progresses, methods, or insights in other approaches, disciplines, topics, and vantage points. Clearly, there will always be non-overlapping concerns and approaches, no matter how interdisciplinary we try to "be." However, an absent conscious effort to wander out of one's analytical and methodological comfort zone will bode ill for any effort to launch a reinvigorated agenda in political economy. The "how" of this is a matter to be addressed and discussed in specialized forums, workshops, and working groups. Training the trainers and educating the educators should not be avoided on account of specialization, seniority, or other reasons.

Do not assume that language and terminology are innocuous or simply a container: Many, but not necessarily all of us who labored over a dissertation can recall the terminological straight-jackets we found ourselves confined to/in for various "discipline-related" reasons. Even when we rejected certain concepts, the terms we used to challenge them swam in the same lake, making it difficult to do more than enhance their utility or reduce their analytical disutility—let alone unmask their political motivations. One needs to rethink and debunk problematic terminology based on its referents, assumptions, and implications by identifying the extent to which they accord with or depart from observable phenomena. For instance, in the early 1990s, the phrase "economic reform" was commensurate with neoliberal reforms of sorts, assuming a normativity that elided empirical or analytical scrutiny. The task was to figure out how to promote such reforms and remove the obstacles that stand in their way. Volumes of text were written in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles and books to delineate and scrutinize every aspect of this uncontested

task. However, critics, including myself, a graduate student at the time, challenged their approach using a terminology that addressed their field of knowledge and analytical gaze, rather than casting doubt on, or debunking the entire endeavor. More than two decades after this literature dominated what the subfield called “the politics of economic reform,” we are confident, at the very least, that such a prescriptive theorizing should have been posited as one option, as opposed to its enduring legacy as the ‘normative’ and ‘natural’ path from which diversion is a faux pas, if not a necessary return to some dark inefficient and cruel path. Conversely, problematizing every single concept can lead to paralysis. It makes the task of conversing with others, and and/or debunking endeavors nearly impossible, and produces a useless echo chamber. Instead, we should set our priorities and pick our terminological battles accordingly. This should become a subject of deliberate discussions among writers who identify the non-innocuous nature of terms and wish to work through them.

Do not be afraid to talk about class, Marx, capitalism, and, well, imperialism: The issue is one of usage not utterance, analytical utility not sacralization. Marx himself will undoubtedly revisit some of his insights in light of changing conditions. Having said that, there is a marked concern among many, especially in mainstream circles in the United States, with outing oneself as a Marxist, or as someone who takes the Marxist tradition as a guide of sorts, even if selectively. I will not delve into the reasons for lack of space, but suffice it to say that this norm is of such gravity that those who adopt or cite such concepts are perceived as outmoded, unaware, or even delusional. However, the tenor of this anti-Marxist or anti-Marxian view is political through and through, and often comes from people who know very little about the notions they critique and frown upon. These individuals are more analytically dangerous than those who were never exposed to the Marxist tradition to begin with for they believe that the little they think

they know is sufficient to justify their position. This viewpoint applies to words like “class,” “capitalism,” but also “imperialism,” though in different ways. In response to this ‘Marxphobia,’ many scramble to use alternate words to avert critique and, even worse, dismissal (i.e., being dismissed epistemologically and professionally), diluting what they intend to claim. There is no panacea for this problem, save for proper usage that comes with demonstrable knowledge of the terms in question. The challenge, however, remains a difficult one: those who frown upon these, and other, words for being ideological assume that their counterpoints are devoid of ideology, simply because the formulas they support are actually the (very) political status quo posing as the natural outcome or state of affairs. Therefore, it is important for those who use Marxist and post-Marxist terminology to pull the ideological rug under their opponents, just as those same opponents claim that it does not exist. Again, how to do this is entirely up to you.

Larger Picture and Comparative Gazes

Break the long-standing distinction between the developing world and the “first” world: Keeping them separate in comparative thinking does not serve to produce sound knowledge. Compartmentalizing “developing countries” or non-western countries into categories of exception, deviance, or any other label, then confining comparative work to these intra-categories renders the so-called social-scientific approach defunct. More significantly, it denies us the opportunity to demystify and interrogate certain concepts, like democracy, that are used to erect such boundaries and categories (i.e., democracy). While comparable relational aspects exist across democratic polities, the import of the methodology of such comparative exercises is not necessarily productive for the “scientific” enterprise. Moreover, this approach is sometimes lacking analytically, if not counterproductive, when it yields outcomes that do not reflect important cases situated

outside these categories. This has happened time and again, when a significant or dominant cohort repeats the same comparisons restricted to a particular set of cases. Thus, the knowledge produced on certain topics, oil for instance, remains abridged, leaving out, say, “Middle Eastern” cases that can illuminate analytical frameworks or findings that are absolutely necessary to cumulative knowledge. Furthermore, given that various mechanisms of economic exploitation are not radically different across “regimes,” or other categories, renders such boundaries ephemeral and quite misleading. Finally, comparative historical perspectives that escape simplistic snapshot views of the terrains under study reveal important recursive relations and influences across categories. In order to give differential due to such relations across time based on their particularities on a case by case basis, one does not have to make the maximalist assertion that underdevelopment (however configured) is always caused by the development of the “first world.” This is where some of the caveats discussed above, such as those cautioning against a reductionism that marginalizes variables outside political economy, can come into play. In all cases, the act of analytically zooming out, so to speak, to see more connections and similarities across situations that are often drawn from unnecessarily separate categories—beginning, thus, a process of investigation and comparison, while paying no heed to the critics frowning upon terminology, so long as its merits are demonstrable and compelling—should become a common practice.

Understand the affinity between neoliberalism and its natural domestic allies globally and its implications: Much, perhaps too much, has been written about neoliberalism, primarily in the form of a much-deserved critique, even if unequally compelling. A significant body of scholarship imparts much weight on the imposition of neoliberal reforms, jettisoning the fact that neoliberal policies are preferred by most elites. This critique is levelled at both proponents of

neoliberalism and some of its detractors. The former sing the praises of its policies as a cure to the ills of economies in “developing” countries, or at least as sound economic prescriptions. They often ignore that the elites who manage such policies, under the assumption of achieving overall growth and stability, are the ones reaping exponential and disproportionate benefits. The implication is equally lost on the detractors: international financial institutions do not need to impose such policies, so that local elites adopt them. Neoliberalism and its outcomes, or discontents, are compatible with the interests of elites almost ubiquitously, even as the latter proclaim a form of socialism as a guiding principle—that is the operative formula. All they need is an ideological cover. Syria is a crucial example, as neoliberal policies were adopted without any interference or pressure from external actors.

Though this observation reveals the affinity between local elites and neoliberal policies, it also invokes the importance of a structure of incentives in the existing global political economy. It is not a coincidence that those who are able and continue to exploit the working classes find neoliberalism particularly convenient. On the one hand, neoliberal policies can proceed and further the regimes’ abilities to exploit, while maintaining, at the very least, an ideological cover on the international scene. After all, taking this path is one avenue to enter the “moderate” “community” of nations.

The link between the perpetuation of authoritarian regimes and neoliberalism is demonstrable, as regimes shifted alliances and coalitions from left to right. The implications of this relationship on the growing social polarization, and its attendant economic and institutional exploitation and disempowerment in the last quarter of a century, notably in the Middle East, merit further investigation on a case-by-case basis. The combination of the global and the local/regional provides a worthy starting point for understanding the background that

led to the Arab uprisings, the crisis in Greece, and beyond.

Policies, Processes, and Sectors

The myth of the private sector as panacea: There is an unspoken sacred cow called the private sector. It is assumed to be part and parcel of a(ny) recovery program for countries with economic hardships. Critiques of this claim are abundant, often coupled with empirical research demonstrating it does not hold water. For the most part, arguments in defense of the claim are linked to the idea that the market depends on private initiative, which not only makes it work more efficiently, and in a less corrupt manner, but also produces a democratizing effect. Private initiative is said to buttress civil society, itself assumed to act as a buffer against the state in the service of individuals, social groups, and private organizations. Thus, the private sector panacea is bound up with an entire liberal and neoliberal tradition that continues to separate politics from economics, allowing for spurious observations to replace rigorous explanatory frameworks or narratives. In most cases, the private sector did not live up to expectations, and instead of contributing to a sustainably grown, buttressing democracy, it reproduced, more often than not, existing pre-“reform” relations of power; gave rise to a more entrenched crony capitalism; and increased social polarization vertically (between social classes) and horizontally (between rural and urban areas). Surely, this does not even begin to scratch the surface of a comprehensive critique of the private sector as a solution. Suffice it to say here that dogmatic approaches—those that do not advocate a substantial role for the public sector in what is called developing countries, but pin development and growth on the private sector—are likely to unintentionally encourage social polarization (even in so-called “first world” or post-industrial capitalist countries). However, that is not to say that a return to the ubiquitous dominance of the public sector is the answer. This question, which for the most part is considered through

a binary system, is, in fact, misplaced; our role is to develop better ones. In the meantime, Yahya Sadowski, in a Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) article he wrote in the 1990s, called for identifying the optimal division of labor between the public and private sectors based on the specific resources and characteristics of a given country. Still, we need to develop better measures, indices, and criteria with sustainable and equitable development in mind, where delimiting the mechanisms of exploitation should be the starting point.

Uneven development: One of the neglected issues—or less scrutinized, even among writers who are critical of the dominant discourse on reform—is the question and reality of uneven development *within* particular countries. There are several reasons why any critical approach to political economy should concern itself with this topic. First, the empirical reality of uneven development, usually between the rural and urban areas, is itself an outcome of the limitations of neoliberal prescriptions, including those that pay lip service to “rural development” but invest—knowingly or unwittingly—in actors who are less likely to carry it out. The consequences of such policies, as discussed above, coincide with the interests of local elites and their preference for sectors that prioritize profit over “development” and short-term ventures over long-term sustainability. Invariably, those preferences include the investment in non-labor-intensive projects that involve quicker and higher returns, usually within the service, trade, and tourism sectors. When investments are geared toward the countryside or the agricultural sector, they lack the comprehensive approach that ensures a sustainable use of labor and resources beyond the term of the project—during which the interests of the local populations are almost always trampled on, if not completely ignored. Of greater importance is the issue of agricultural land use and its tie to various business interests and landowners who privilege a reversal of land reform, often citing dubious studies that emphasize “efficiency” over forms of social justice.

The “efficiency” trope, however, is hard to come by in the short run, and reproduces forms of exploitation and stagnation in the medium-to-long run, with no identifiable benefit to the populations involved, or to rural “development.” The list of uneven development woes is long, complex, and needs to be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

The years, sometimes decades, of rural neglect leading both to social discontent and gradual mobilization are another reason to address such asymmetries. The conditions preceding the Arab uprisings in several countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, are the best example of this phenomenon. Without descending into reductionism, uneven development was an identifiable factor that provided the impetus, and in some areas, the backbone, for widespread social mobilization, in spite of us witnessing variance across and even within cases. After more than twenty to twenty-five years of neoliberal reforms, several social groups are harmed; those living outside the metropolitan areas, small towns/cities and villages alike, are most severely affected. In some cases, Syria notably, these spaces became a significant driving force for mass protests. However, to avoid spurious conclusions, we must delve into each case separately. In all cases, uneven development, whatever form it takes, is ignored at the researcher’s analytical peril, as it is one of the more potent causes of structural inequality.

The fusion of political and economic power: Addressing the question of “fusion” constitutes an advancement and a drawback. On the one hand, it is certainly a welcome corrective to liberal frameworks, which, for the most part, separate the two. On the other hand, it assumes that the political and economic are inherently separate realms that can be fused together, or not. Such a conclusion is based on a false premise, since these two so-called realms are largely constitutive of one another, and thus inseparable, and usually indivisible, dimensions of power and its reproduction.

That does not mean that social, communal, and cultural factors do not figure as dimensions of power. It simply means that without addressing the former, we will continue to have an abridged version of reality. Furthermore, some analysts, including Timothy Mitchell in *The Rule of Experts*, have cast doubt on the existence of the “economy” as a separate realm. There is no need to debate the merits of such a claim here, except to entertain its tenor: the importance of deconstructing and interrogating the concepts and relations that we take for granted, simply because we are so comfortable using, promoting, or even critiquing them. The import here is less about how to understand the natural fusion (though this is a necessary task), and more about avoiding the pretense that there are two completely separate realms: the economic and the political.

Perhaps more than any other trope of liberalism, this claim has contributed to the development of an entire agenda of research and conceptual thinking that remains divorced from basic realities the world over. As far as how to make use of debunking such claims of separateness, and of making sense of how these realms are mutually constitutive, this is in fact *not* an automatic issue: the manner in which these realms are constitutive of one another depends on the context in which we are conducting research. There is an important caveat: we should not avoid speaking about the “political,” the “economic,” or the “social,” but must recognize the ways in which these realms are inextricably connected and mutually constitutive, as we posit explanatory variables and narratives. Examples of debunking the separateness of these supposed independent realms abound in the literature, but the most productive exercises to unearth such relations relate to non-authoritarian regimes, as the fusion is not immediately evident to all observers. The literature on the United States perfectly illustrates my point: not only do many miss such connections, but there is a plethora of arguments that deliberately

separate the two realms in the service of highlighting democratic acumen, as opposed to unearthing capitalist relations of power.

Conclusion

The takeaway here is not so much that we are better off considering these elements, factors, and caveats. The fact is that many analysts do, but often do so selectively, paying no attention to how the caveats discussed are a part of a larger, inter-related framework that needs to be addressed holistically. Rather, what is needed is a more comprehensive understanding of the building blocks of any critical political economy approach that seeks to identify the systemic drivers of inequality, the mechanisms of exploitation, and their attendant ideational and ideological discourses. If we do not consider the import of these drivers and mechanisms, in themselves necessary to reproduce systemic, social, economic and political relations, we would be reproducing the same discourse that guided much of the problematic policies of the past few decades. The only difference would be marginal improvements that actually legitimize the reproduction of the more egregious forms of exploitation. We would go back to square one, proceed anew, with yet again, no identifiable impact on inequality or other social ills. That is why we need to reinvigorate critical approaches in political economy.

There is no pretense here that this is not being done already at an individual level. It is. But like everything else that happens outside the realm of power, its chances of success are much higher if it is carried out more broadly. In this regard, the “Political Economy Project,” carried out by the Arab Studies Institute, is attempting to do just that.

There is also no pretense that political-economic factors and

frameworks are solely responsible for explaining the outcomes we observe. Instead, the claim is that without such political-economic considerations, which are often indivisible, we would not be able to adequately understand the outcomes in the medium- to-long term. Similarly, from a structural-historical perspective, it would be difficult to understand these otherwise strange bedfellows that include former socialists and lingering capitalists, except from a narrow “profit-seeking” perspective. The social-structural transformations that take place over extended periods of time would be jettisoned. Such transformations generate new interests and discourses that help us understand and explain long-term or protracted transitions.

In this manner, inequality should no longer be construed as a simple, unfortunate consequence of the powerful seeking to aggrandize their power and profits at the expense of the rest; it is not an unfortunate side effect that can be fixed via policy or concerts, or worse even, a reflection of variance in industriousness or motivation among individuals and groups. Inequality is rather a systemic development tied to the workings of capital, which subordinates other social and political processes, from communitarianism to democracy.

Yet again, we are faced with such socioeconomic challenges, which are likely to draw prescriptions for solutions across the region. In most cases, notably in Egypt, we have been observing an unfortunate reality—a return to the same prescriptive models that had contributed to the start of the uprisings in the first place. It is no longer, as it never was, sufficient to critique and debunk forms of neoliberalism. Increasingly, there is a desperate need to provide robust alternative models that are based on the interests and positionality of real stakeholders, who can support or advocate their implementation. To make this happen, we will need a renewed clarity, as well as a practical and critical political economy, lest we sink back into the

vicious binary between the exploitative powers, be they local or global, and the ideal alternatives that are unconnected to their natural constituents. The cautionary points above are perhaps a mere starting point in the right direction.

Framing Arab Poverty Knowledge Production: A Socio-Bibliometric Study

- Sarah El Jamal and Sari Hanafi -

Introduction

Based on Karl Mannheim's theory that knowledge is socially constructed, and its production process is influenced by the social context (Manheim 1936), this study seeks to identify and analyze the social influences and forces behind the knowledge produced and disseminated in the form of academic journal articles on the topic of poverty in the Arab world. Although the knowledge production process will not be studied in its making, certain features and elements of the final body of knowledge (the articles) will be taken as indicators of the process in hindsight. These will be the basis of three kinds of analyses that will be carried out: content analysis, authorship analysis, and citation analysis. In content analysis, we will scrutinize poverty-

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related concepts, the methodologies applied, and the use of theory, including the theoretical frameworks of the studies and the prevailing political and epistemological paradigms, as well as the structure and type of articles (critique, essay, fieldwork). In authorship analysis, we will survey the sociological markers pertaining to the authors and institutions producing the articles. In citation analysis, we will analyze the characteristics and trends of the references, namely citation frequency, co-citation and how authors are grouped in clusters, and citation trends by language of the article. Ultimately, we aim to answer the following questions: what are the social factors that condition the production of academic articles on poverty in the Arab world? And what are the observed trends thereof?

Methodology

A sample of 201 articles was retrieved by running a keyword search in Arabic, English, and French from the year 2000 onward for the words Poverty OR Destitution OR Social Exclusion OR Social Class AND Middle East OR Arab OR [The name of every Arab country], and their equivalence in Arabic or French. English references were primarily derived from Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus (136 articles), which are two of the largest citation databases of peer-reviewed literature. Arabic references were scarcer, primarily due to the limited availability of Arabic databases. E-Marefa,¹ the only reliable Arabic database, yielded 29 results only, while the rest of the articles were retrieved from other online or print sources.² Articles in French were derived from the CAIRN platform (9 articles). We chose to focus on the last fourteen years, i.e., starting from the year 2000. Articles that explicitly tackle poverty in Arab countries were analyzed, including those which make comparisons with other regions.

In a spreadsheet, coded information on the sociological markers of

each article was collected, then imported into the program SPSS for analysis. These consist of the title in English, title in the original language, language, translation, publication date, issue number, journal, author, number of authors, institutional affiliation, country of institutional affiliation, region of institutional affiliation, discipline, diasporic status of author, geographical scope, keywords, and a list of cited authors. The spreadsheet was also uploaded to CorText Manager, an online network analysis tool that generates network maps of cited authors. The top cited authors were identified, and a co-citation network map was created using a statistical semantic measure proposed by Weeds (2003). The network is also organized according to clusters of interconnected subgroups of authors distinguished by colored circles. This was done by applying the Louvain Method for community detection based on the work of Blondel et al. (2008).

Qualitatively, an analysis of the most cited authors was first conducted to examine their disciplines, institutional affiliations, connections to other cited authors, most commonly cited contributions to the body of poverty knowledge, and their influence on other articles. Second, a qualitative analysis of a sample of knowledge produced from within the Arab world was conducted to scrutinize the following elements: dominant paradigms, the choice of the research question, and what was being actively left out or dismissed.

Table 1: Number and percentage of production by language

Language	Number	Percentage
Arabic	55	27.4%
English	136	67.7%
French	10	5%
Total	201	100%

Source: Authors' dataset based on 201 articles (2015)

Sociological Markers

Our study reveals a major insight, namely that the Arab poverty knowledge network of producers and influencers is highly elitist in nature. It is run by specific institutions and academics to the exclusion of other factions of the knowledge society and society at large. According to Alice O'Connor, author of *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*, this echoes the politics of knowledge in broad terms; well-placed researchers act as advocates for certain theoretical frameworks and methodologies (O'Connor 2001). This has resulted in the professionalization of poverty knowledge and the adherence to established standards of scientific expertise. He puts it succinctly: “the claim to scientific objectivity rests on technical skills, methods, information, and professional networks that historically have excluded those groups most vulnerable to poverty [...] putting poverty knowledge in a position not just to reflect but to replicate the social inequalities” (O'Connor 2001, 11). Arab poverty knowledge appears to be a political act or an exercise of power in which an academic elite overwhelmingly affiliated with the UN Systems institutions—like the World Bank, the Economic Research Forum (ERF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), etc.—determines how poverty is defined, measured, studied, and ultimately, dealt with.

Authorship

The majority of the authors in our sample are university academics (73.2%); hence academia is quantitatively the largest producer of knowledge on poverty, from inside the Arab world than outside it. Then come such international organizations as the World Bank (10.5%). It is noteworthy that the World Bank is also the most often cited source. Granted, all 201 articles are academic journal articles, working papers,

or papers presented at conferences; 28.9 percent of them are working or conference papers published by the ERF.³ The publication of the remaining articles is more or less divided equally among 102 academic journals, each producing no more than 3.5 percent of the articles. This indicates that there is no single dominant producer of Arab poverty knowledge, nevertheless ERF is an outstanding one.

Articles published by the ERF are all written from an econometric approach, for the most part in English and by academic economists. This is reflected in the fact that 67.7 percent of the sample papers are in English, 27.4 percent in Arabic, and the remaining 5 percent in French. Although almost half of the articles (47.3%) are co-authored by two or more authors, one author emerges as the most prolific: Sami Bibi.⁴ He has written 7 percent of all articles and almost half of the English articles on Tunisia. It is noteworthy that he is also the seventh most cited author in the pool surveyed.

The Geography of Article Production

Approximately 65.2 percent of the authors were located in the Arab world at the time of writing, which leaves over a third writing from outside the region. Narrowing down to country, we find that 12.4 percent of the authors were located in Iraq; 11.9 percent in Egypt; 10.9 percent in the USA; 9 percent in Tunisia; 7.5 percent in Jordan; 7 percent in Lebanon; 6 percent in the UK; 5 percent in Canada; and the rest were distributed among numerous other Arab and non-Arab countries.

Content Analysis by Keywords

How has the ideological evolution of the discourse on global poverty influenced Arab poverty studies? A quantitative study of recurring keywords across the articles reveals that State Policy and Intervention are the most prevalent ones (64.65%). This is in line with the post-

Washington Consensus paradigm that promotes state intervention in a discretionary way, as opposed to the Washington Consensus, which blindly accepts neoliberal policies and is antipathetic to state intervention. Then we find that articles tackle, in decreasing order of frequency, Social Inequality, Poverty Measurement, Rural Poverty, Employment, Poverty Causes/Determinants, Education, Urban Poverty, and Spending Behavior. The prevalence of Social Inequality as another top keyword also points to the adoption of pro-poor growth literature in the poverty discourse after decades of neglect.

If we look at articles written from inside the Arab region and the rest of the world separately, we find that the three most frequently referenced themes in the Arab world are still State Policy and Intervention, Economic System, and Social Inequality. This means that writing the article from inside the Arab world does not isolate the author from the dominant trend in the entire collection of the articles. That said, Poverty Causes, Education, and Employment are much more prevalent here, which counters the Western paradigm, while Rural Poverty is more frequent in the articles published outside the Arab world.

Separating the articles by language, regardless of author's location, shows that articles in Arabic are the most likely to tackle Education or Poverty Causes/Determinants. Articles in English are the most concerned with Social Inequality, Rural Poverty, Poverty Measurement, and Spending behavior. Finally, articles in French have the highest frequency of State Policy and Intervention, Economic System, Employment, and Urban Poverty.

Although currently based in Canada, many of Sami Bibi's articles were written when he was still in Tunisia, reflecting the dominant trend of non-diasporic authorship in our sample. At 84.8%, non-diasporic authors make up the large majority of our sample while the diasporic

authors comprise only 15.2%, most of whom were located in North America or Europe at the time of writing their respective articles. This trend persists when holding the language variable constant; almost all Arabic articles (98.1%), 79.1% of English articles, and 88.9% of French articles are written by non-diasporic writers.

Table 2: Diasporic Status of Author(s)

Diasporic Status of Author(s)	Percentage of Articles
Non-diasporic	84.80%
Arab in North America	7.60%
Arab in Europe	4.60%
Arab in Other Part of the World	1.50%
Non-Arab in Arab Region	1.00%
Non-Arab outside Arab Region	0.50%
Total	100%

Source: Authors' dataset based on 201 articles (2015)

Content Analysis by Research Topic

Analyzing the choice of research questions tackled in the articles reveals another prevalent paradigm that echoes the Western one: poverty research, which “takes postindustrial capitalism as a given and focuses primarily on evaluating welfare programs, as well as on measuring and modeling the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the poor”

(O'Connor 2001, 16). The two most frequently chosen research topics in our sample are “poverty alleviation methods”—mostly subsidies and transfers with the present economic system taken as a given—at 18.4 percent, and “profiling or measuring poverty” within a certain location and/or for a certain demographic at 15%. Then comes pro-poor growth at 9 percent, where the effect of economic growth—with the present economic system again taken for granted—on the poverty level is studied. Pro-poor growth is based on Dollar and Kraay’s paper and is in line with the ‘inclusive growth’ rhetoric put forth by the World Bank (Dollar and Kraay 2001).

At 8 percent, Income Inequality is the fourth most tackled research topic. Here we distinguish between income and social inequality, and stress that income inequality is tackled in the typical poverty analysis article only. Social inequality is a broader concept that includes, in addition to income inequality, inequalities based on race, gender, class, age, etc., and inequalities in access to healthcare, rights, access to employment and education opportunities, and social capital. Only 5 percent of articles tackle gender inequality, and only one article provides social class analysis. Not only does this re-emphasize the prevalent tendency to reduce human welfare to a mathematical equation, but also reflects the struggle – in Western poverty knowledge – between the individualist interpretation that blames the individual for their inability to escape poverty, and the structuralist interpretation that blames the economic system for keeping people in poverty (O'Connor 2001, 9).

The individualist interpretation has become the most prevalent one, as there is a “virtual absence of class as an analytic category, at least as compared with more individualized measures of status such as family background and human capital” (O'Connor 2001, 9). Another sign of the domination of individualist rhetoric is “the reduction of race

and gender to little more than demographic, rather than structurally constituted categories” (O’Connor 2001, 9). The present economic and social structures are taken as inevitable conditions rather than systems that are “socially created and maintained” (O’Connor 2001, 9). The discourse on poverty and reform has unnoticed ideological boundaries that “eclipse an alternative, more institutionalist and social democratic research tradition” for the sake of “remaining realistic or ‘relevant’ for political purposes” (O’Connor 2001, 9).

This individualist rhetoric is also echoed in the articles tackling the determinants of poverty as the main topic, making up 7 percent of the sample. The determinants are identified using regression analysis, and the possible factors considered are most often specific to the poor or the spaces they inhabit, which isolates them from the grander social and/or economic structures to which they are bound. Conspicuously absent is a discussion of other classes’ impact on the poverty level. It is also remarkable that the determinants of poverty are tackled less frequently than poverty reduction strategies. The discourse focuses on solving the problem more often than it tries to uncover its causes.

Network and Citation Analysis

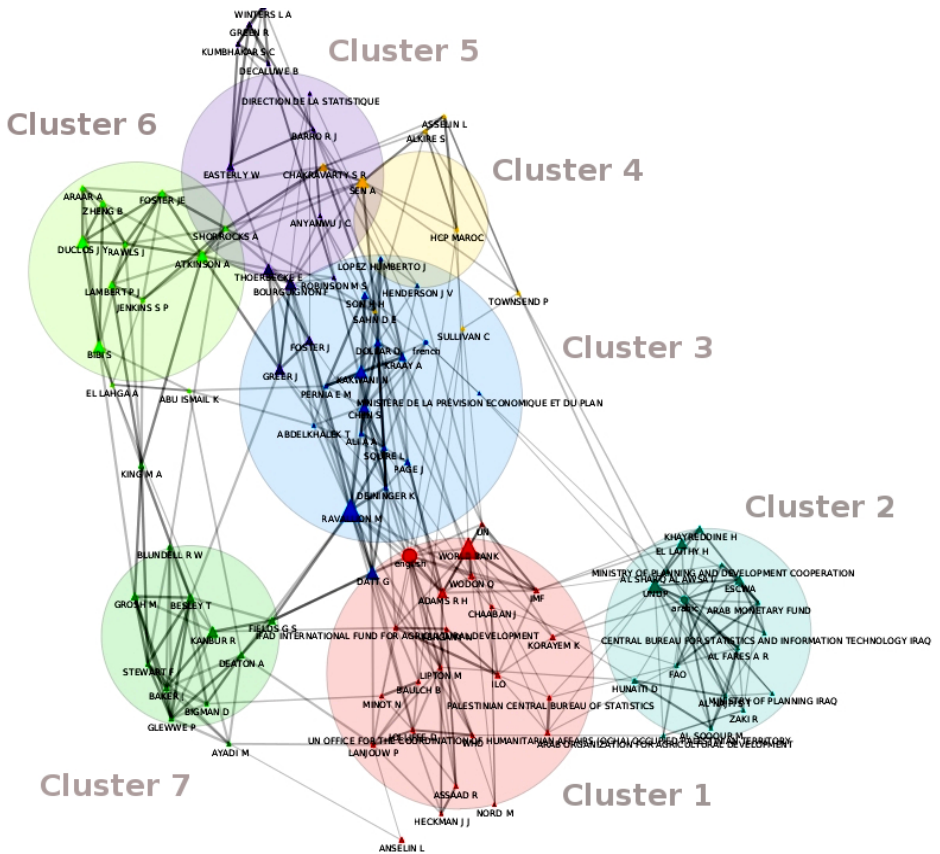
The citations used in the articles can be indicative of the collective knowledge production process and the dynamics of the underlying discourse among authors on a global level.

The Co-Citation Network

Figure 1 depicts a map of the co-citation⁵ network connecting the top one hundred cited authors who influence the authors of our study. Rather than focusing on the authors of our study, i.e., authors of articles on Arab poverty, the map is a visualization and

mathematizing of the broader field of global poverty scholarship reflected in the citations of the sampled articles. This is based on the assumption that scholarship can be seen as a discourse among agents engaging in a network. Authors who are co-cited are inserted into a discourse with one another, together forming a certain intellectual tradition, niche or another commonality amongst them.

Figure 1: Co-Citation Map by Language of Article



Source: Authors' dataset based on 201 articles (2015)

The nodes of the network are heterogeneous: the triangles correspond to authors cited at least five times in our sample, and the dots correspond to the article's language. The size of the node is directly proportional to the total number of times the respective author is cited. Every incident of pairs of cited authors is taken into account to construct a co-occurrence matrix from which a proximity network is tracked using a statistical semantic measure proposed by Weeds (Weeds 2003, 82).⁶ The grey lines linking the nodes indicate co-citations, with widths directly proportional to the number of co-citations. The circles depict clusters, or groups of highly interconnected nodes representing authors that are cited simultaneously in the entire set of articles.

The network is also organized according to clusters of interconnected subgroups of authors distinguished by colored circles. This is done by applying the Louvain community detection algorithm (Blondel et al. 2008). Each cluster is assigned a tag ("English," "Arabic," and "French") indicating the most commonly used language in the publications, in which the authors of the corresponding cluster are cited. The computation was performed using the CorText platform of the Institut Francilien Recherche, Innovation, Société (IFRIS).⁷ In order to analyze the network and understand the roles and relationships of its agents, we evaluate the position of the co-cited authors in the network map as a whole, as well as his or her respective cluster. The map shows that the nodes representing the top one hundred cited authors are well-connected across all three languages; yet each language belongs to a distinct cluster comprised of even tighter interconnections. The total number of clusters, each of which is identified by a distinctly colored circle, is seven. We describe them as follows:

1. The English Language Cluster

Articles in English, represented by the red dot in the pink circle, belong to a cluster that shows frequently cited authors. In decreasing order

of citation frequency, these include the World Bank, Richard H. Adams, Karima Korayem, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Luc Anselin, and others. Although the World Bank is the number one most cited author in the network and the cluster, it is not uniformly co-cited with every agent in the English language cluster. As shown in the map, the darkest edges linked to it are also connected to a few other authors, and lighter edges link it to the rest of the cluster members. It is most heavily co-cited with Quentin Wodon, an adviser in the World Bank's Education Department, Richard H. Adams, an economist who was part of the Economics Research team at the World Bank Group, the IMF, which is also closely affiliated with the World Bank, and the "UN" as a generic author. This sub-cluster is very redundant, as all of the above are strongly affiliated with the World Bank or the UN system institutions. This indicates that the authors who cite the World Bank tend to cite researchers and institutions that are strongly affiliated with it too, which leads to a hegemonic discourse that perpetuates the narrative of the World Bank.

2. The Arabic Language Cluster

Articles in Arabic, represented by the green dot in the teal circle at the bottom right, belong to a cluster that shows frequently cited authors. In decreasing order of citation frequency, these include the UNDP, ESCWA, Heba El-Laithy, Doukhi Hunaiti, and others. Like the English-language cluster, though to a lesser extent, the discourse in this cluster is heavily influenced by UN agencies and UN-affiliated economists, including the UNDP, ESCWA, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and Heba El-Laithy (an Egyptian statistician and ERF fellow). Doukhi Hunaiti, a Jordanian economist affiliated with the UN system as a consultant and advisor, is distinct in his contribution to the cluster as he writes in both Arabic and English. He also serves as a bridge node to the English-language cluster.

3. The French Language Cluster

The French-language cluster is the blue circle in the center. In decreasing order, its top co-cited authors are Martin Ravallion, Gaurav Datt, Nanak Kakwani, Shaohua Chen, Aart Kraay, and David Dollar, who have all worked at the World Bank as either economists or statisticians. Hence the French-language poverty discourse is also heavily influenced by the World Bank's narrative. Gaurav Datt also serves as a bridge node to the English-language cluster.

4. The Amartya Sen Cluster

At the periphery of the network lies a small, singular cluster with fewer nodes and looser connections, both within itself and with other clusters. The beige circle at the top right is dominated by a single, yet highly influential author who holds a distinctive position in the poverty discourse. Amartya Sen is one of the few economists cited for their theories, econometric methods, and poverty measurements. He is an Indian economist and a Nobel laureate, who is most frequently cited for his axiomatic framework (Sen 1976) and theories on multidimensional poverty (Sen 1987). He is one of the top cited authors unaffiliated with the UN system institutions, even though he has influenced the UNDP's Human Development Reports and the World Bank's poverty rhetoric with his capability approach to defining poverty. His take on measuring human development is central to the knowledge produced by the UN and the World Bank.

5. The Foster-Greer-Thorbecke Cluster

The cluster depicted by the purple circle at the top includes François Bourguignon, William Easterly, James Foster, Erik Thorbecke, and Joel Greer as the main hubs. The most central node is François Bourguignon, a professor of economics at the Paris School of

Economics and the former chief economist and senior vice president at the World Bank in Washington. His work on transfers and poverty targeting is the most cited (Bourguignon and Fields 1997).

6. The Atkison-Bibi-Duclos Cluster

A sixth distinct cluster, depicted by the light green circle, is centered around the economists Jean-Yves Duclos, Anthony Atkinson, and Sami Bibi. Duclos is a researcher at the Centre Inter-universitaire sur le Risque, les Politiques Économiques et l'Emploi (CIRPÉE), and a program coordinator at Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP), an international organization that links researchers globally. His work with Peter J. Lambert on how to measure “horizontal inequity” is most cited (Duclos and Lambert 1998).

7. The Kanbur-Deaton-Besley-Fields Cluster

The last cluster in the co-citation network, the green circle at the bottom left, has several mainstream economists, some of whom are strongly affiliated with the World Bank. The core node is Ravi Kanbur, a British economist and university professor who worked at the World Bank for almost two decades; he directed the World Development Report.⁸ His work on food subsidies, co-authored with Tim Besley, is the most cited (Besley and Kanbur 1988).

Top Cited Authors

As shown in Table 2, linking the institutional affiliations of major contributors to the discourse reveals that the top 25 most cited authors on the topic of Arab Poverty are as follows: 19 central authors positioned at the cores of the co-citation clusters, 3 semi-peripheral authors positioned in-between the core and the periphery of each cluster, and 3 peripheral authors positioned at the outer borders of the clusters. The central authors can be grouped as follows: authors who are directly affiliated with the UN system and its specialized agencies, the

World Bank, UNDP, ESCWA, and their employees; 2 Arab economists affiliated with the ERF; and academics (mostly economists) who have influenced the work of the UN's specialized agencies without a direct affiliation. The semi-peripheral authors are the ILO, which is another UN specialized agency, and 2 academic economists unaffiliated with the UN and its agencies. The peripheral authors are 2 Arab economists unaffiliated with the ERF or the UN agencies, and a niche economist who is specialized in spatial econometrics.

Table 3: Most Cited Authors

Cited Author; Network Position	No of Cit- ations	Most Commonly Cited for	Affiliation	Connection to Other Cited Authors
World Bank; Central	208	World Development Report data		Specialized agency of the United Nations
Martin Ravallion; Central	173	Poverty measurement steps (Ravallion 1998)	As of 2013 he was the inaugural Edmond D. Villani Professor of Economics at Georgetown University. Previously he was the director of the research department at the World Bank, Washington	Director of the research department at the World Bank from 1988 to 2013

UNDP; Central	119	The Human Development Reports		Specialized agency of the United Nations; influenced by Sen's capability approach
Gaurav Datt; Central	66	Poverty targeting (Datt and Ravallion 1995)	Monash University, Melbourne, Australia	Has worked in research positions at the World Bank and co-authored numerous publications with Martin Ravallion
Amartya Sen; Central	58	Multidimensional poverty (Sen 1987) and the axiomatic framework (Sen 1976)	Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University	Influenced UNDP's Human Development Reports
Heba El-Laithy; Central	54	Poverty line studies (El-Laithy 1996)	Professor of Statistics, Cairo University	ERF Fellow, collaborates with Sami Bibi

Sami Bibi; Central	50	Methodology for studying pro-pooriness of economic growth (Bibi 2005)	Research Advisor, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), Labour Program, Research and Data Development (RDD) Division	ERF Fellow, collaborates with Heba El-Laithy, has provided training workshops on econometric software (STRATA) for poverty analysis at the World Bank Institute and UNDP Syria, is closely connected to Jean-Yves DUCLOS
Jean-Yves Duclos; Central	47	Measurement of Horizontal Inequity (Duclos and Lambert 1998)	Researcher at CIRPÉE and Professor at University of Laval	Has collaborated with Sami Bibi
Nanak Kakwani; Central	47	Economic growth and inequality (Kakwani and Pernia 2000)	Professor of Economics at University of South Wales, Australia	Consultant for the World Bank, Washington, DC, and UNDP, Manila

ESCWA; Central	47	Economic indicators from Technical Papers		Specialized agency of the United Nations; collaborates with the UNDP
François Bourguignon; Central	45	Transfers and poverty targeting (Bourguignon and Fields 1997)	Professor of Economics, Paris School of Economics	Previously: Chief Economist and Senior Vice President, World Bank, Washington; worked with Chakravarty and Atkinson
Erik Thoebecke; Central	43	Foster-Greer-Thorbecke class of poverty measures	Professor of Economics, Cornell University	FGT measure was developed by Professor Erik Thorbecke, his former student Professor Joel Greer, and another graduate student at Cornell University at the time, Professor James Foster

Ravi Kanbur; Central	43	Food Subsidies (Besley and Kanbur 1988)	Professor of Economics, Cornell University	D. Phil. (Oxford). Thesis Advisers: Joseph Stiglitz, James Mirrlees and Amartya Sen (1989–1997 World Bank)
Anthony Atkinson (Sir); Central	42	Inequality measure (Atkinson 1970)	Warden, Nuffield College, Oxford	Co-authored a book with François Bourguignon
Shaohua Chen; Central	41	Growth Incidence Curve (Ravallion and Chen 2003)	Senior Statistician in the Development Economics Research Group of the World Bank	Senior Statistician in the Development Economics Research Group of the World Bank; collaborated with Martin Ravallion and Gaurav Datt

<p>Joel Greer; Central</p>	<p>38</p>	<p>Foster-Greer-Thorbecke class of poverty measures</p>	<p>US General Accounting Office, Washington, and previously with Cornell University</p>	<p>FGT measure was developed by Professor Erik Thorbecke, his former student Professor Joel Greer, and another graduate student at Cornell University at the time, Professor James Foster.</p>
<p>Richard H. Adams; Central</p>	<p>38</p>	<p>Measuring inequality and poverty (Adams and Page 2003)</p>	<p>Professor of Law at the University of Chicago Law School</p>	
<p>William Easterly; Central</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>Economic growth</p>	<p>Professor of Economics, New York University</p>	<p>World Bank: 1985-2001</p>

James Foster; Central	29	Foster-Greer-Thorbecke class of poverty measures	Professor of Economics and International Affairs at The Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University	FGT measure was developed by Professor Erik Thorbecke, his former student Professor Joel Greer, and another graduate student at Cornell University at the time, Professor James Foster, co-authored a book and co-taught with Amartya Sen
Doukhi Hunaiti; Peripheral	23	Rural Poverty (Hunaiti 2005)	Professor of Rural Development and Agricultural Economics, University of Jordan	
Karima Korayem; Peripheral	21	Poverty measurement for Egypt (Korayem 2002)	Professor of Economics, Faculty of Commerce (Girls), Al-Azhar University	Consultant to the World Bank, UNDP, ESCWA, and ILO

Luc Anselin; Peripheral	21	Spatial Regression Analysis (Anselin 2003)	Director of the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning (ASU), Arizona State University	
Satya R. Chakravarty; Semi- peripheral	21	Poverty measurement (Chakravarty 1983)	Professor of Economics at Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, India	Co-authored publications with Bourguignon and Ravi Kanbur
ILO; Semi- peripheral	21	Employment figures		Specialized agency of the United Nations
Angus Deaton; Semi- peripheral	20	The measurement of poverty in India and around the world (Deaton 2005)	Professor of Economics and International Affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Economics Department at Princeton University	

Source: Authors' dataset based on 201 articles (2015)

1. Central Authors: The United Nations System

The most central authors who make up the cores of the co-citation clusters are the agencies and employees of the United Nations System consisting of: the World Bank, UNDP, ESCWA, and the authors who have worked for, or collaborated significantly with, these institutions: Martin Ravallion, Gaurav Datt, Nanak Kakwani, François Bourguignon, Ravi Kanbur, Shaohua Chen, and William Easterly.

The World Bank, a specialized agency of the United Nations System and a Bretton Woods Institution, is the most cited. During World War II, delegates from 44 nations met in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire for the Bretton Woods Conference to put forth a system of regulations and institutions for the international economic system. This included the plan to found the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank; by 1945 both were in operation. The World Bank's declared mission is to "eradicate poverty and promote shared prosperity" (The IMF and the World Bank 2014). Over 15,000 academic articles and books have been published by the Bank since 1995. The frequency with which these publications have been cited shows that they have tremendous influence on development studies and thought (Development Economics 2012).

2. Central Authors: Academics Unaffiliated with the UN System

The top cited authors unaffiliated with the UN system are, for the most part, academic economists with long-spanning careers as university professors. They have influenced the work of UN agencies in traceable ways without ever being employed by any of them. In this category, the top cited author is Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate and Professor of Economics at Harvard University. Known for his sense of ethics and humanity, he is known as "The Mother Teresa of Economics" in his native India. He contributed to formulating the United Nations' Human Development Index, which has become "the most authoritative

international source of welfare comparisons between countries” (Steele 2001). He has also contributed to the multi-dimensional definition of poverty, which examines the “capability” to function in society, and includes dimensions beyond income, like education, health, security, self-confidence, access to opportunities, facilities, resources, and human rights (Sen 1987).

3. Central Authors: Arab Economists Affiliated with the ERF

The only Arab authors centrally positioned in the co-citation network are Sami Bibi and Heba El-Laithy, both academics and research fellows at the ERF. Heba El-Laithy, Egyptian university professor of statistics, is most cited for her poverty line studies (El-Laithy 1996). It is interesting to note that their works are mainly cited by authors affiliated to regional institutions, which means there is a regional debate on poverty that is going on.

4. Semi-Peripheral Authors

The ILO is the only UN agency with no central position in the co-citation network. The ILO is most commonly cited in relation to employment figures. Satya Chakravarty, an Indian economist who has co-authored publications with central authors like François Bourguignon and Ravi Kanbur, occupies another semi-peripheral position. Angus Deaton, an academic economist with no affiliation to the UN system, is the third semi-peripheral author in the top twenty-five cited list.

5. Peripheral Authors

Doukhi Hunaiti, Karima Korayem and Luc Anselin, three of the top twenty-five cited authors, occupy a peripheral position in the co-citation network. Hunaiti and Korayem are Arab academic economists. Hunaiti is Jordanian and independent of the UN system. Korayem is Egyptian, and has worked as a consultant to the World Bank, UNDP, ESCWA, and ILO. Korayem (Korayem 2002) is cited on Egyptian

poverty, while Hunaiti is cited on rural poverty (Hunaiti 2005). Luc Anselin is also an academic economist. He specializes in spatial econometrics and is not affiliated with the UN system.

Qualitative Analysis of Arab Poverty Knowledge Production

A qualitative analysis of the articles in our sample reveals that Arab poverty knowledge is of an overwhelming ideological nature, reflecting the evolution of the Washington Consensus in the USA. Poverty knowledge is “a project of twentieth-century liberalism [...] deeply rooted in the rise of the ‘new liberalism’ that emerged in late nineteenth-century Euro-American political culture as an alternative to the laissez-faire individualism of the industrial age” (O’Connor 2001, 8).

The Western discourse on poverty in ‘Third World countries’, led by the World Bank and academic economists, has gone through three distinct shifts of paradigms and stages of ideological evolution. The major reference point in this historical evolution is the Washington Consensus, a term that represents the general agreement between the international financial institutions, the American government, the Federal Reserve Board, and the major think tanks in Washington to implement certain policy reforms to stimulate growth, decrease inflation, maintain a healthy balance of payments, and distribute income in an equitable manner in the developing world (Lora 2009). Accordingly, three phases emerge: pre-Washington Consensus, Washington Consensus, and the post-Washington Consensus (Saad-Filho 2010).

The rhetoric on the benefits of economic growth, economic reform or market liberalization, and subsidies and transfers as anti-poverty

strategies is dominant. The aforementioned policies are usually tested using policy simulation models. This trend is in line with the ‘trickle-down’ paradigm that contends that poverty reduction is a by-product of economic growth and neoliberal policies. Here again, inclusive growth is also present in the literature, represented by the term ‘pro-poor growth.’ As expected, and because they are not in line with the dominant paradigm, charity, income redistribution, the private sector, education, and healthcare receive little attention in the sampled articles. Though an important anti-poverty strategy that has received significant attention worldwide, microfinance, strangely enough, was absent in our sample. Even in those articles which seem less influenced by the neoliberal agenda, authors still advocate the market and economic performance. The following quote illustrates this tendency, “despite the controversy about the causal link between openness and economic performance in the literature, the virtues of trade’s contributions to faster growth and poverty alleviation are generally recognized” (Hassine and Kandil 2009, 1). In addition to the dominant neoliberal bias in the discourse, there is a less prevalent narrative that emerges in some articles. Its paradigms, frameworks, and talking points serve to point out the loopholes and omissions of the neoliberal narrative, while putting forth alternative concepts, methodologies, and solutions pertaining to Arab poverty. The findings are based on a qualitative analysis of 17 articles comprising an alternative niche within the poverty discourse.

This anti-neoliberal discourse advances several arguments to challenge the rumored benefits of globalization toward the alleviation of poverty; criticize the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programs that the World Bank or the IMF often prescribe for developing countries; and debate the validity of the ‘trickle-down’ claim. Besides the explicit contestation of neoliberalism, some authors offer an alternative discourse that uses qualitative methods to break away

from the predominantly quantitative tradition in Arab poverty studies. Others refer to local faith-based concepts and solutions to poverty, such as Zakat, revealing that these are in line with secular concepts and narratives, for the most part, while offering untapped solutions designed to alleviate poverty and inequality. Only two articles study the historical context of Arab poverty through the lens of colonialism, imperialism, war, and conflict. One article is exceptional as it engages the ‘voices of the poor,’ comparing them with macro-level data.

Conclusion

The findings in this study indicate that the majority of academic knowledge on Arab Poverty is modelled after empirical paradigms based on the normative structure and methodologies of the UN Systems. This topic suffers from the hegemony of the discipline of economics and a lack of sociological, anthropological, historical, political, and interdisciplinary perspectives. There is a heavy reliance on the quantitative approach, while the qualitative one is almost completely neglected. The data source is predominantly secondary, and much more purpose-specific fieldwork is needed. Studies of social inequality and class analyses of the contexts in which poverty prevails are absent. Fawwaz Traboulsi, Visiting Professor at the American University of Beirut, argues that poverty studies replace studies on income distribution—the latter restricted to the global level at best (the rich billionaires and the rest)—and poverty is depicted as a natural catastrophe or a contagious disease (Traboulsi 2005). Consequently, we study poverty without studying wealth. We define the “poor” but not the “rich.” And the middle class is either represented as a shrinking body, both in size and effectiveness, therefore, dying out, or as the repository for the mission of democracy. In both cases, little socio-political effort is invested in studying its political behavior, assuming that it tends to be homogeneous and unidirectional (Traboulsi 2005,

530). In the same line of thought, Thomas Piketty sees the tax system as a primary reason for social inequality, and calls for taxing big corporations as a way to redress wealth redistribution (Piketty 2014).

The vast majority of the articles we surveyed are concerned with strategies to alleviate poverty, but significantly less so with the determinants or causes of poverty. The neoliberal paradigm propagated by the Washington Consensus is prevalent. Textual analyses of the articles reveal that most champion the free market, trade liberalization and globalization, while neglecting the role of the general economic structure, recurring market failures, the non-poor class, income redistribution, charity, microfinance, etc. Most articles are produced in English, although two thirds of them are written from within the Arab world by non-diasporic authors. There is a pervasive Western hegemony of thought, structure, and language. In a nutshell, “globalization is now seen to be the only game in town: MENA had better learn the rules and start playing by them—or else [...]” (Bush 2004, 676).

ENDNOTES

¹ This database contains 1015 academic and statistical journals issued by various bodies (universities, research centers, public statistical departments, central banks, scientific associations, and regional organizations) in the Arab world in three languages, Arabic, English and French, though mainly in Arabic. Other than E-marefa, there are also two databases, one for all sciences, called al-Manhal (<http://www.almanhal.com/>), whose coverage is much less comprehensive than E-Marefa’s, and the second concerns literature on education only (produced in or on the Arab world), called Shamaa (Arab Educational Information Network). Currently, about 20,000 studies are documented in Shamaa, 5,000 of which with their full text.

² In the following journals: *Idafat*, *Omran*, *Mu'tah Lil-Buhuth wad-Dirasat*, and *The National Sociological Journal*.

³ The ERF is a research center (with NGO status) and a network devoted to economic research for the sake of development in the Arab world, Turkey and Iran, in whose creation the World Bank has played an important role and has always supported financially. The ERF is also a project by the UNDP, from which it receives institutional support. See <http://erf.org.eg/partners-donors>.

⁴ He is a Tunisian economist who is currently a Research Advisor at the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). He is also a Research Fellow at the ERF. Previously, he was a Professor of Economics and has provided training workshops on econometric software (STATA) for poverty analysis at the World Bank Institute and UNDP in Syria. He has graduate degrees in Economics from both Tunisia and Canada.

⁵ Co-citation is the frequency with which two authors are cited together by the same article. First introduced by White and Griffith, the co-citation map is an integral part of bibliometrics (White and Griffith 1982). There is no discrimination between cited co-authors of the same article and two cited authors of two distinct articles. This does not affect the validity of the co-citation network as a visualization of a discourse between authors.

⁶ More precisely, the measure we use is called “difference-weighted mutual information-based co-occurrence retrieval models.” The similarity between two authors results from the comparison of their profile of mutual information they share with every other authors in the network.

⁷ CorText is the digital platform of IFRIS, which includes a direct access to network computing tools named the CorText Manager.

⁸ For more information on Kanbur, visit <http://www.kanbur.aem.cornell.edu/bio.php>.

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ISBN: 978-9953-0-4057-8



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