

14<sup>th</sup> SeSaMO Conference

**PATHS OF RESISTANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

University of Turin (Italy)

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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

**TITLE: Far from the eyes, far from the agenda? Political parties and activism in the MENA: between innovation, resistance and resilience**

**CONVENOR(S):** - Giulia Cimini  
- Gaia Gondino

**ABSTRACT:**

Seven years since the “Arab Uprisings,” declining turnout rates and low levels of trust among ordinary citizens towards political institutions depict a general mistrust regarding formal politics in the MENA region. Although political parties played a marginal role during the upheavals, they nonetheless gained relevance once the ‘transitions’ began and represent key interlocutors in policy-making and as further actors of (re)production of political and social (in)stability.

The panel is interested in investigating how political parties have been transforming – or not – into vehicles of citizen mobilization and representation, as well as in scrutinizing how their willingness and ability to aggregate and put forward bottom-up interests affect the potential for democratic transition, consolidation or even regression.

To what extent political parties or coalitions channel public expectations of political change in a context of democratic transition, backsliding or authoritarian resilience? In what ways old political elites try to re-institutionalize their networks and new ones reshape the political scene? Whose interests do they purport to advance or defend?

Hence, we seek original papers that elaborates on new, renewed or long-standing parties in the above contexts and that contribute theoretically, empirically and/or methodologically to understand the different trajectories of change and continuity.

Contributions are invited from different disciplines including Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology, History and Area Studies.

**CONVENOR’S ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

**Giulia Cimini** is Teaching Assistant of Political Science at Università L’Orientale of Naples, where she has recently defended her PhD in International Studies. She previously collaborated with “StreetPol: Participatory challenges from Tunisia to Oman,” funded within a SIR Grant and worked at the EU-Spring Project on “Democracy and Citizenship Rights in North Africa after the Arab Awakening”.

**Gaia Gondino** is a PhD student in Social and Political Change at the University of Turin and Florence. She is also conducting a co-supervised doctoral research thesis with the University of Paris Nanterre and the ISP - Institut des Sciences sociales du Politique.

**PAPERS:**

**FIRST SESSION**

## 1. (Re)configurations organisationnelles et recompositions partisanses au Hezbollah libanais depuis 2011

Erminia Chiara Calabrese

### ABSTRACT:

Cette communication se propose d'analyser ce qui fait « une entrée en guerre » à une structure partisane. A partir d'une enquête ethnographique menée depuis 2011 auprès de la base militante et combattante du Hezbollah dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth je m'intéresse à la manière dont l'engagement de ce parti en Syrie a amené à des reconfigurations organisationnelles mais aussi à des recompositions partisanses. Plus précisément j'interroge ici les modalités par lesquelles la guerre affecte les structures et la vie au parti et notamment au niveau de la promotion, des hiérarchies partisanses, des pratiques disciplinaires, des sanctions, du recrutement et de la sociabilité militante. Dans une deuxième partie je m'intéresse à comment les partis tiennent leurs militants dans un contexte de guerre, contexte qui implique des coûts d'engagement très élevés : mort au combat, torture, emprisonnement, retours de nombreux blessés. Cette communication sera l'occasion de partager les premiers résultats d'une enquête de terrain (entretiens, conversations et observations) menées dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth depuis 2011 auprès des militants et des cadres de ce parti.

### PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA PROPONENTE:

**Erminia Chiara Calabrese** est chercheuse post-doctorante au Centre d'études en sciences sociales du religieux (CESOR) à l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris. Ses recherches portent notamment sur la violence politique, le militantisme y compris les engagements armés et le chiisme politique au Proche-Orient. Parmi ses travaux : *Militar au Hezbollah. Ethnographie d'un engagement dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth*, Karthala/Ifpo, Paris/Beyrouth, 2016 et *Violence et militantisme. Parcours d'engagements au Proche-Orient*, (dirigé avec Valentina Napolitano), Editions du Cnrs, Paris, 2017.

## 2. Ennahdha, the Salafi Political Parties and the Islamic Public: Between Coalition, Competition and Conflict

Théo Blanc

### ABSTRACT:

In 2011, the Islamist party Ennahdha arose as the dominant actor in the Tunisian Islamic field. This apparent hegemony however dissimulated an unprecedented phenomenon of diversification, fragmentation and politicization of Islamic actors. For the newly elected Ennahdha, a key challenge was thus to deal with these new Islamic actors that belonged to the same epistemic community but could threaten the democratic process on which the acceptance of Ennahdha by its secular counterparts depended. It was not clear, in particular, whether the newly created Salafi political parties would constitute a menace or a safeguard for democracy. On the one hand, Salafi political parties provided a nexus for the politicization of radical Salafi-Jihadi that could resort to violence and destabilize democracy. Allowing and even encouraging such parties would provide the Salafis with the opportunity to voice their grievances through a legalist repertoire of action, and could thus prove an

efficient bulwark against radicalization. On the other hand, Salafi parties' ties with Ennahdha undermined the relationship of the Islamist party with its secularist counterparts. Ennahdha soon found itself caught in a cross-fire, with both its democratic credentials and Islamic credentials being criticized, and thus struggled to find an appropriate equilibrium. We argue that this equilibrium – i.e. the relationship between Ennahdha, the Salafis and the secularists – has evolved following the political context, i.e. opportunities/constraints generated by domestic and international events. We propose to make sense of this evolving relationship by investigating how Salafi parties have provided alternative fora of mobilization for Islamic activists through three main periodic steps: Coalition, Competition and Conflict.

#### **PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA PROPONENTE:**

**Théo Blanc** is a Ph.D candidate at the European University Institute (Florence) in the department of social and political science. He works on political Salafism under the supervision of Prof. Olivier Roy.

### **3. La place des partis politiques dans la fabrique de l'action publique sous regimes autoritaires : le passage de l'agenda partisan à l'agenda légilatif au Maroc post-printemps arabe**

**Ahmed Fouad El Haddad**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

La place des partis dans la fabrique des politiques publiques constitue aujourd'hui un champ de recherche qui interroge la représentation sous l'angle d'une approche dynamique. Les différentes générations de travaux qui se sont succédées mettent toutes à jour des résultats contrastés, ou au mieux, un consensus sur la nécessité d'une mesure plus précise de la variable partisane. Cette mise en articulation de l'objet « partis » et de l'objet « politiques publiques » conduit à une réflexion renouvelée sur l'influence des élections dans les produits de l'action publique. En revanche, l'intérêt pour la question de « *do parties matter ?* » ne s'étend pas jusqu'aux partis œuvrant sous des régimes autoritaires. Sur la base du cas marocain, considéré par l'indice *Polity*, comme un régime fermé, des données textuelles originales ont été obtenues par un codage thématique des lois, des discours du monarque et des programmes électoraux des partis de la majorité couvrant le mandat gouvernemental de Abdel-Ilah Benkiran. Ce travail prend le contre-pied du postulat de la faiblesse des partis dans les « autoritarisme arabes ». Notre argument est que les « institutions nominalement démocratiques » créées par la monarchie permettent aux partis d'inscrire leurs priorités dans l'agenda décisionnel, devenant ainsi des faiseurs de politiques publiques une fois qu'ils sont élus. Les résultats des données montrent en effet un haut niveau de congruence entre les produits de l'action publique et les programmes électoraux. De même, qu'une faible interrelation entre l'agenda royal et partisan. Ainsi, en contradiction avec ce que suggèrent les recherches, les résultats avancent un cas où les partis aux affaires sont à la fois influents et autonomes.

#### **ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

**Ahmed Fouad El Haddad** is a PhD candidate in political science at Sciences Po Bordeaux. His work focuses specifically on the responsiveness of decision-makers under authoritarianism to the demands of the population and of interest groups through the case of Morocco.

#### **4. Let's don't have a party (or just a meaningless)! How authoritarian regimes continue to prevent democratic upgrading in the MENA region**

**Jan Claudius Völkel**

##### **ABSTRACT:**

The continuing lack of meaningful political parties across the MENA region is seen as one of the core obstacles for democratic upgrading since the Arab uprisings in 2011. While most Arab countries were formally multiparty systems since the 1970s, meaningful competition between parties did not happen in any of these countries. The dominance of either one state party (like the "National Democratic Party" in Egypt, the "Ba'th Party" in Iraq and Syria or the "Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique" in Tunisia), a full ban of parties whatsoever (like in Libya) or the strong predominance of the presidential or monarchical executives (like in Algeria, Jordan and Morocco) kept political parties irrelevant.

The Arab Spring provoked hopes that political parties could now develop into meaningful actors. Support programs started in order to strengthen existing parties or institutionalize newly established ones. Party legislation was loosened, and bans particularly against Islamist parties were lifted.

However, against the expectation, political parties did not develop into significant actors; in contrast, the existing "deep states" in their different formations, continue to telecontrol these parties for their own power cementation.

Based on extensive interviews in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, this paper analyzes the regimes' ongoing suppression of political parties as potential competitors for power. It identifies two major strategies, inclusion and exclusion, that both lead to the elimination of party-based politics in the end. From a neo-institutional perspective, it will argue that breaking-up these suppression strategies would be a crucial condition if further democratization steps shall be seriously taken.

##### **ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

Dr **Jan Claudius Völkel** is Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel with a research project on "The role of national parliaments in the Arab transformation processes" (2017-2019). He has extensive research and teaching experience in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen.

#### **SECOND SESSION**

#### **5. Authoritarianism in search of definition: Rethinking party politics and the rise in performance-based policies in post-revolutionary Egypt.**

**Maria Gloria Polimeno**

##### **ABSTRACT:**

The 2011 and 2012 matched in Egypt with the flourishing and institutionalisation of almost 50 new political parties. While some of them already existed as social movements, others structurally emerged in the context of the country's political vacuum and transition. Such

political richness fuelled expectations and hopes in a democratising process. However, following the 2013 coup Egypt politics underwent consistent transformations that corresponded to the centralising of practices of suppression of the civil society. Five years have passed since the coup and formerly institutionalised political parties have today disappeared from the domestic political scene next to all forms of opposition. On a different level, in the mid-2015 political authorities began to make direct and more consistent reference to social justice and development policies. All these aspects could be seen as a historical exceptionalism on the one hand. On the other they underline an unfinished and unclear project of transition and consolidation of the political power. In effect, in spite of the centralising of performance, according to statistics the government in the country still lacks of moral and social acceptance. The broader aim of this study is to offer theoretical and empirical reflections principally on the making and then on the transformation of power-authority in Egypt after 2015. To this end, the study will take into account and discuss the evolution, transformations and implications behind (i) 'the end of party politics' in today's Egypt (ii) the performance -based politics strengthened by political authorities in 2016. These two axes will be developed around the issue of moral and social justification of the political rule in contemporary Egypt.

#### **ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

**Maria Gloria Polimeno** is Teaching Fellow and Doctoral Researcher in Middle East Politics at the University of Exeter. In the academic year 2017-2018 she awarded a Teaching Fellowship at SOAS, Department of Politics and International Studies In 2016-2017 She taught at Birkbeck College, University of London. She holds several appointments at SOAS as Visiting Scholar and Academic visitor (European Commission funded grant) and at City, University of London as Honorary Research Fellow. Among her research areas are included: transformation of states and institutions in the Middle East, Security Studies, Islamist movements (with a clear focus on the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis), Political Economy of the Middle East.

#### **6. La responsabilité des partis politiques dans l'échec des négociations relatives à la réconciliation intra-palestinienne**

**Sarah Daoud**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

La Palestine a, à maintes reprises, été considérée comme une exception, restée hermétique aux vagues de mobilisations qui ont ébranlées le monde arabe en 2011. À tort, car celle-ci n'a pas échappé à la tendance générale. En revanche, elle se distingue en effet de ses « voisins », dans la mesure où les revendications palestiniennes renvoyaient davantage à un impératif de réconciliation nationale.

Depuis 2007, la Palestine est en proie à une division politique, et de fait territoriale : le Fatah est le parti dominant dans les Territoires Palestiniens occupés, tandis que le Hamas contrôle la bande de Gaza. Plusieurs tentatives de réconciliation furent alors amorcées, sous égide égyptienne essentiellement. En vain.

Toutefois, en mai 2011, dans la mouvance des soulèvements arabes, de jeunes activistes palestiniens, pour la plupart, organisent diverses manifestations ; à l'instar du « Mouvement du 15 mars », au cours duquel une critique des échecs successifs de réconciliation est véhiculée, renvoyant Hamas et Fatah dos à dos.

Il apparaît aujourd'hui évident que ces mobilisations eurent un effet catalyseur sur les négociations de réconciliation, puisque dans la foulée toutes les factions palestiniennes, réunies au Caire en avril 2011, signent un accord. Bien que ce dernier n'ait jusqu'à maintenant pas été appliqué, il demeure le document de référence pour une réconciliation future.

Il convient toutefois de souligner une évolution notable dans le processus de réconciliation. La dimension nationale de cette dernière, caractérisée par l'implication de tous les partis politiques ainsi que de la société civile, a, depuis 2011, été progressivement reléguée au second plan.

Ainsi, les revendications d'union nationale ayant été éludées par les deux factions dominantes, et face à l'impuissance des partis traditionnels, des individus (députés, figures politiques, chercheurs) tentent de jouer les médiateurs, afin de sauvegarder l'impératif de réconciliation nationale, condition *sine qua none* de la mise en œuvre de réformes politiques exigées de longue date.

#### **ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

**Sarah Daoud** est doctorante en science politique à Sciences Po Paris (CERI). Elle s'intéresse à l'influence des dynamiques régionales sur la politique intérieure palestinienne depuis 2005, prenant le processus de réconciliation intra-palestinien comme cas d'étude. Rattachée à l'IFPO de Jérusalem, elle mène actuellement des recherches en Cisjordanie, avant de se rendre au Caire en février 2019.

### **7. Historicizing Heterogeneity in Political Protest across North Africa: A comparative case study of the post-colonial experience in Morocco and Tunisia**

**Johnathan Walsh**

#### **ABSTRACT**

In his 1954 publication "The Independence Movements in Arab North Africa", Moroccan political revolutionary Allal al-Fassi outlined his belief that anti-colonial movements across the Maghreb shared fundamental characteristics that unified their struggle against political domination. Fifty-seven years later, and the inception of the Arab spring saw a reinvention of this narrative; despite new and more varied centres of political authority, widespread remonstrations were derived from a similar collective political experience. However, despite very comparable levels of what are commonly cited as key determinants of the Arab Spring across the region (for example regionalised, ethnically determined inequality) the strength and success of manifestations of political grievances were far more fractured: where the Jasmine and Tahir revolutionaries of Tunisia and Egypt found success in gaining requisite support to oust their leaders, the under-supported February 20<sup>th</sup> movement in Morocco and widespread but ultimately unsuccessful Algerian protests did not.

By taking the historical experiences of both post-colonial Morocco and Tunisia, this paper contrasts several historical factors underlying this difference in cultures of political protest, and relations between society and centres of political authority. Aside from more general observations on the construction of post-colonial national identity that have led to state-centric interests at the expense of regional alliances, this paper specifically finds questions of religious legitimacy of actors involved in elite-level competition and the existence of external conflict as crucial. In turn, this paper observes how this influenced particular characteristics regarding secularity, the gendered nature of politics of protest, and internal between-group communication as especially determinant of participation in the 2011 Arab spring.

**ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

**Jonathan Walsh** is an MA International Relations graduate from Leiden University, where he wrote his thesis analysing the role of the UN in the formative years of the Western Sahara conflict. Jonathan has experience working as a journalist for the Rabat-based Morocco World News, and is currently a research and policy analyst for the Institute for Economics and Peace.

**8. Whom Do Islamist Political Parties Seek to Represent? The case of the Moroccan Party of Justice and Development (PJD)**

**Beatriz Tomé-Alonso**

**ABSTRACT**

The 2011, 2015 and 2016 PJD's electoral success has highlighted the scholarly need to address political representation by the so-called Islamist or Islam-oriented political parties as they keep attracting voters regardless their difficulties to advance electoral promises. This article aims to contribute to the theoretical and empirical debate about Islamist representation by analyzing whom the PJD may seek to represent. In order to reach this goal, the paper will conduct an analysis of the 2011 and 2016 PJD public discourse. It will argue that the PJD seek to represent (1) those who have felt left away by traditional parties and (2) those who want to fight corruption and bring moral politics back to the public scenario.

**ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

**Beatriz Tomé-Alonso** is lecture in International Relations at the Universidad Loyola Andalucía (Seville, Spain) since January 2017. Her research deals with the interconnections between the international, regional, and domestic levels and Islamist politics with a regional focus on North Africa and specially on Moroccan politics. She has done extended field research.