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**TITOLO/TITLE: Migration and Integration in the Middle East**

**PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s: Gennaro Errichiello and Dalia Abdelhady**

**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):**

Research on the integration of immigrants has emphasised the limits of the integration discourse in countries of the Global North, whereby immigration and integration are integral to national narratives. Critical analyses of integration discourses draw attention to the ways they are implicated in power dynamics (Saharso 2019; Schinkel 2017) and produce various experiences of discipline and violence (Abdelhady et al. 2020). The panel intends to explore the analytical utility of integration as a concept and policy goal in the Middle East, a region that has largely been overlooked in integration debates. While the study of migration in the Middle East has flourished in recent decades, the focus is often on processes of displacement and dispossession, marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination. The Middle East is now currently dealing with conflicts and humanitarian crisis in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen. Instability and chaos seem to be pervasive in the whole region and local authorities seem to be disoriented on how to deal with the massive presence of migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people.

This panel highlights integration alongside these processes, by drawing attention to the social, cultural, and political dynamics that inform immigrants' involvement in the daily life of many societies in the region. Illustrating the complex dynamics of immigrant experiences, the panel aims to expand the analysis and critique of integration debates and discourses by bringing in analyses of integration in the region.

Many countries in the Middle East are important hosts for large groups of migrants and refugees, almost all countries in the region do not provide avenues for acquiring citizenship to immigrants and promote policies that ensure exclusion, segregation and marginalisation. This has led much scholarship to focus on processes of temporariness, and precarity (Silvey and Parrenas 2020) or indifference. Colonial legacies play a significant role in shaping experiences of integration in the Middle East today, as they inform ethno-racial hierarchies, notions of belonging to the nation, and the national policies of exclusion themselves (see for example AlShehabi 2021; Fernandez 2021). The analysis of state policies towards refugees and migrants, and the emphasis on inclusion, exclusion or "strategic indifference" (Norman 2020) has attracted much attention from scholars interested in analysing the role of the state in governing non-citizen populations. This research needs to be contextualized within and complemented by the analysis of the experiences of immigrants themselves. Notably, the reluctance of states in the Middle East to provide rights for the increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees leads to temporariness and precarity playing important roles in the experiences of immigrants in the region. At the same time, however, many immigrants have established a sense of belonging to communities in the region, and have become an important aspect of the cultural diversity that enriches its daily life, despite their inability to access much social, economic or civic rights. Additionally, refugees

and immigrants integrate to the economic and political lives of their host societies. This line of analysis highlights the role of informal processes of political and institutional incorporation as opposed to formal policies that characterise the integration literature emerging from the Global North.

Analyses of Asian migrants in the Arab Gulf countries (for example, Ali, 2010; Kanna, 2011; Longva, 1997; Gardner, 2010, Vora, 2013) have emphasised the need to move beyond singular analyses of migrant experiences (in this context as *homo oeconomicus*) and underlined the need to adopt a more integrative and comprehensive approach in order to emphasise the dynamism of migration in the Gulf countries (see the historical analysis in Errichiello 2012), and migrants' agential capacity (Errichiello, 2021, Errichiello and Nyhagen 2021).

What then does integration mean in the Middle East? How do we understand immigrant wellbeing and rights in contexts where citizens have limited access to democratic institutions? How do we conceive of integration when examining the experiences of migrants in contexts where they regard their presence as temporary? The panel aims to expand the critical theorizing on integration and examine the ways immigrants narrate their experiences beyond policy categories and frameworks. By centring the experiences of immigrants themselves in the analysis of integration, the panel would push the academic discussion beyond the binaries of exclusion/inclusion, citizen/noncitizen, insider/outsider.

**Chair:** Gennaro Errichiello

**Discussant:** Dalia Abdelhady

#### **List of participants**

Marco Ammar (University of Genova) and Pamela Murgia (University of Urbino), **Migrants as social actors in the Arab press**

Since the war in Syria began in 2011, more than half a million Syrian refugees entered the neighbouring country. Palestinian refugees, who escaped to Lebanon since 1948, have suffered more limitations than their counterpart in other Arab countries, by being essentially excluded and living in a "state of exception" provoked by the nature of Lebanese camps and gatherings as closed camps (Hanafi 2010). This precedent has heavily influenced the current policies and expectations of Syrian refugees, whose integration might be understood within the specific case of the country being a "mosaic" country (Barakat 1973), where internal balances especially concerning sectarianism, familism and politics cover a fundamental role, but also its connections to Syria.

The research field of Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, Wodak, van Leeuwen) studies has been particularly concerned, until now, with the issue of discourses on migration. As an interdisciplinary field, combining research methods of linguistics and other perspectives (historical, anthropological, sociological) and methods, it aims at explaining how discourses influence society, especially in policy making, attitudes, and other social practices. The present research will thus explore, under the theoretical framework of Discourse Studies, the role of the Lebanese press in shaping the representation of Syrian refugees and their perception, and the role such narratives play in the context of social and political action regarding their integration in the country. The corpus comprises articles from the news outlets al-Akhbar and al-Nahar. Analysis will focus on argumentation strategies (van Eemeren 2013), metaphors, and the representation of refugees as social actors (van Leeuwen 2008).

Jessy Abouarab (Center for Women's and Gender Studies of Florida International University), **Queering Syrian Refugee Security in Lebanon**

This paper explores the asymmetric impact of increasingly normalized refugee crises on processes of integration through a case study of Lebanon. Building on Vaughan Robinson's concept of integration as an 'individualized, contested and contextual' concept, this paper addresses Lebanon's perpetual state of crisis discourse that manipulates refugee security construction and affects contextual integration experiences of queer Syrians residing within its various communities. It will apply Kimberly Crenshaw's representational intersectionality as a methodological tool to evaluate the extent to which LGBT+ politics are addressed in risk societies through a multifaceted lens. First, this chapter contextualizes the structures of domination that guide performative refugee assimilation and LGBT+ policy practices. It, then, highlights the heteronational attitudes towards sexual and gender expression and identity that hamper the complex dynamics of immigrant experiences of assimilation. Drawing on published policies, stories, news, and reports, this paper contributes to a discussion on representational intersectionality in Lebanon, where contextual dynamics of privilege and oppression shape the precarity of queer refugee experiences of inclusion and marginalization through self-reinforcing and transformative processes of integration.

Matteo D'Avanzo (Scuola Superiore Normale of Pisa), **Between marginalization and integration: the community of Ethiopian Jews in Israel**

Ethiopian Jews' massive immigration into the State of Israel took place between the middle of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s. The demographic weight of the community has increased more and more but compared to the Mizrahim (Jews from North Africa and the Middle East) not only their status appears to be considerably weak, even their political and social activism appears almost non-existent. The relief efforts to facilitate their inclusion within Israeli society highlight several dramatic criticisms: the participation of Beta Israel groups in political life seems scarce, so their representation within the Knesset. Furthermore, a series of events brought to the attention of the public highlights a latent racism towards these new citizens from Africa. Therefore, their status as migrants and their provenance seems to ban them within Israeli society, where the Ashkenazi Jewish majority and in part the new ruling class of the Mizrahim remains hegemonic to this day. Through a purely historical-comparative methodology (by using archival records and newspapers as primary sources and academic works and reports as secondary sources) between them and the Mizrahim, the paper aims to investigate how the State of Israel proceeded with the incorporation of the Ethiopian Jews and which issues have subsequently arisen. Legal aspects like citizenship, absorption, and social benefits (all granted through the Law of Return) raise the question of their integration within the State of Israel which appears relevant to understand the role of racialisation and it allows to use an intersectional approach to analyse this case.

Majd OWDA (Centre d'Etudes Diplomatiques et Stratégiques, Paris) and Raed ABUBADAWIA (Arab American University), **Legal and political obstacles to Palestinian refugees Integration According to the Lebanese Labour Law**

Palestinian refugees suffer from general legal obstacles to exercising their right to work in Lebanon. These obstacles ranged between flexibility and strictness, according to the political conditions in Lebanon. However, we find that in the recent period there have been multiple attempts by the labor ministers in Lebanon to ease these restrictions. However, these attempts met with internal political pressures that worked to limit the impact of these

attempts in easing the burden on Palestinian refugees in the exercise of their economic and social rights. The last of these attempts was the recent decision of the Lebanese Minister of Labor November 25, 2021 related to excluding Palestinians from the Lebanese citizenship requirement for many professions in Lebanon. Despite the positive impression left by this decision, this decision raised a legal confusion about the Palestinians' right to exercise their right to work in many professions regulated by ordinary law in Lebanon or left the matter of their assessment to the concerned professional syndicates. This paper will work on accurately standing on the legal and political obstacles to the exercising the right of work to the Palestinian refugees inside Lebanon, and its impacts on their integration in Lebanon. With focusing on the recent decision of the Lebanese Minister of Labor and its repercussions on the integration of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Sena Taha, (Ibn Khaldun University), **Writing Refugee Lives**

Nation-states, NGO's, and the media generally identify the refugee as a 'threat' or a 'problem'. By continuously focusing on the political, the social and the humanitarian in Refugee Studies, the representation of the refugee continues to be negative. In this paper, I aim to push Refugee Studies towards the humanities -a field that has been neglected in relation to the refugee-. I hypothesize that literature can play a role in re-thinking the identity and experience of refugees. My PhD dissertation focuses on the literature produced by Syrian refugees. Syrians have constituted the highest numbers of refugees around the world (UNHCR), yet their literary writings have been neglected. Syrians are documenting their refugee experience in novels, short stories, and plays. I have read over twenty novels and short story collections and have interviewed many of these writers face to face and via online platforms. They have a double goal: 1) urge their compatriot readers to better connect and re-think their presence in the host country, and 2) raise the awareness of their readers from the host country about the refugee experience. This paper analyzes: *Ṭauq fī 'unuqī*, a novel by Ibtisam Shakush, *Three Refugees and a Half*, a short story collection by Bilal al-Barghuth, and *Les Deux Réfugiés*, a play by the Malas Brothers. I met Shakush in the Arabic Book Fair that was held in Istanbul this year. She is a writer of six novels and ten short story collections. In *Ṭauq fī 'unuqī*, she writes about that period in her life when she was forced to leave her home in Lattakia, Syria for fear of arrest to seek refuge in Turkey, the difficulties she encountered on the way, and her attempts at finding a place to stay in the different provinces of Turkey. Despite the distance, I could also meet with al-Barghuth, a Syrian writer who resides in Germany. He was very kind as to arrange for a video call and answer my questions about his work. Al-Barghuth is a writer of a novel, a short story collection and a collection of poems. For the production of *Three Refugees and a Half*, al-Barghuth reflects upon the route he took when he fled his home in Damascus, Syria, crossing the borders to Turkey, taking the boat to Greece, and

continuing overland until finally arriving to Germany where he sought refuge. On his way, al-Barghuth makes friends and acquaintances and gets to hear refugee stories of all kinds. The refugees he writes about are of different nationalities, and they take different roads, yet they all share the plight of seeking refuge. Even after finding refuge, the struggles of refugees persist. The Malas brothers portray the hardships refugees face as they try to assimilate into the new culture in their play *Les Deux Réfugiés* which they write in French feeling "a need to communicate with the French people in their language" (Al Emam, 2017). After getting arrested and having to leave their "room", the house they had in Damascus which they also used as their theatre, the Malas brothers went to Lebanon, where they stayed for a short period, then to Egypt and were finally granted asylum in France where they now continue

their occupation in writing and performing theatre plays. In all of these works, I use Derrida's concept of hospitality that holds the refugee in the barzakh between guest and host, always in danger of becoming hostile to each other.

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**Gennaro Errichiello** is a Senior Teaching Fellow in International Migration and Diaspora Politics at SOAS in London. He also works at the Office for National Statistics (UK). He holds a PhD in Social Sciences from Loughborough University, an MA in Global Migration from Swansea University, and a degree in Political Science (focus on the Middle East) from the University of Naples “L-Orientale”. He carried out extensive ethnographic research on Muslims in Italy, the United Kingdom and the Gulf countries. He has published articles in peer-reviewed journals and presented the results of his research in many international conferences. His research interests revolve around migration studies and social theory, South-South migration, highly-skilled migrants, migrant associations, ethnicity, nationalism, belonging, (mis)recognition, class and gender.

**Dalia Abdelhady** is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology at Lund University (Sweden). Her work features the application of postcolonial analysis to the sociology of migration. Following a comparative perspective, her work focuses on the meeting point between individual immigrants (and their communities) and institutions in receiving countries (such as schools, labour markets, media and political policies). In addition to a number of journal articles and book chapters, she is the author of *The Lebanese Diaspora: The Arab Immigrant Experiences in Montreal, New York and Paris* (New York University Press, 2011), and co-editor of *Refugees and the Violence of Welfare Bureaucracies in Northern Europe* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

**INDIRIZZO/I EMAIL/EMAIL ADDRESSES:** [ge6@soas.ac.uk](mailto:ge6@soas.ac.uk)  
[dalia.abdelhady@soc.lu.se](mailto:dalia.abdelhady@soc.lu.se)