

POLITICAL ECONOMY PROJECT

INAUGURAL WORKSHOP

DAY 1 – Friday, 24 April 2015

Introduction to the Political Economy Project (Bassam):

We are collectively determining the contours and details of the project. We want to put together an agenda that works. PEP is under FAMA and funded by ASI and GMU, Carnegie Foundation. Funding is capped at a particular level in order to uphold the volunteer, collective spirit.

We would like PE to become a central lens through which scholars view the region, rather than a marginalized or secondary concern. Features of the project:

- 1) Research, Knowledge Production → smaller workshops, conferences, etc.; but focus on producing solid research in political economy;
- 2) Pedagogy → Influence the Classroom (at all levels), Compel educators to use modules, resources on political economy, make materials available in one place;
- 3) Network → Exchange information (on what's going on), create community, bring people together and engage them. Intellectually we can be specific; on the level of practice we want to be more flexible;
- 4) **(Adam)** The project is not just academic, we also want to have an impact on politics in the region. We want our contacts to support new social movements and intellectual currents in the Middle East, for example **independent trade unions trying to work against development reforms that are being imposed on the PA**. They ask, can you help us analyze these labor market laws? Can you help us develop alternatives? We want to be able to assist in a situation like this, answer their questions. **The debt campaign in Egypt, a debt audit is another potential issue**. Can we use our own skills to help out? Intellectual → Practical.
Break with the exceptionalism associated with MEPE and bring in other regions, such as Latin America and East Asia.

(Bassam) **This is not to be a Middle East-centric project**. We want to encourage comparative and cross-regional work.

- 5) Outreach campaigns and messaging: Use social media, YouTube videos, etc., as a means of outreach to send messages about political economy to the masses in digestible fashion, in addition to scholarly research.

People can opt out of certain projects or projects can proceed on smaller scales. We don't all have to do everything. It depends on our discussion regarding governance and structure tomorrow.

Knowledge Production Project (KPP):

Bassam:

This is a central project of the Arab Studies Institute. We are studying what is being produced; What is being overproduced; What is being marginalized; and How can we provide alternatives;

There are remarkable ways in which the Political Economy Project can benefit from KPP. We can decide this together.

KPP aims to collect, organize, and analyze all knowledge produced on the Middle East in the English language since 1979, in seven databases:

1. Peer-Reviewed Journals
2. Books
3. Think-Tank Reports and Personnel (and how they circulate between media, academia, government, and think-tanks)
4. Films, Documentaries, TV shows
5. Translated books
6. Cyber-Space (All websites dealing with region)
7. Dissertations

1990s: Collected articles published in peer review journals. Small sample.

2009-2011: launched KPP on a wide scale

2015: nearly all databases are complete

- 1) We have collected every single peer reviewed article produced in the English language on the region since 1979; more than 67,000 articles and book reviews each with 6-7 fields (PRAD)
- 2) Books
- 3) Think Tanks Database (TTD)→All of the people who worked at these think tanks, traces their movements through different institutions, a visual picture (media, academic, government,), Testimonies in Congress, Contributions
- 4) Films, Doc, and TV Shows (w/text) (FDTD)
- 5) Cyber Space (MECS)

- 6) Translated Books
- 7) Arabic→English, why are certain books translated and other not? What about the books makes them material for translation?
- 8) Dissertations
- 9) ****Citations**** is our next database to build. Dormant now.

+ We are building Research Committees (anthropology already exists, other disciplines to come) for each discipline, region, and a number of salient topics.

Arabic Section to develop in the coming phase.

Visualization 1: Stream Graph of different types of media being produced, but you can also search by topic (such as Islam)

Visualization 2: Multi-channel network showing think-tank personnel and their connections

Visualization 3: Search through Trends in Knowledge

Two Principal Purposes:

- 1) Generic: Search
- 2) Critical: Scrutinizing the Process/Politics of Knowledge Production

Political Economy Research Committee? How can we integrate these two projects?

The PEP Resource Page is a starting point for working across projects.

Knowledgeproduction.com

General Discussion of Purpose and Goals:

Pete: Outreach, reaching out to secondary level and college level educators. Teachers are overburdened and could use resources. Political Economy is not on the fringes, but what is considered Political Economy (i.e., oil—Bablawi—and EU or US policy), the solution is often framed as economic.

Toufiq: Provide access to information on public economic projects in the form of databases (by country), including who benefits/profits through these projects. Example of data visualization: Project [“theyrule.net”](#) maps the links between companies and their boards.

Melani: Pedagogical elements are important because they **direct readers toward materials**. Modules and videos on inequality, which can be plugged into courses or brought into classroom work. The Scholar [Strategy Network \(SSN\)](#) aims to get ideas out into the public with regard to policy. Syria, for example, is in the media for the wrong reasons. SSN aims to emphasize the humanitarian crisis in Syria rather than IS or regional geopolitics. Place cross-disciplinary op-eds and do other outreach, market/tailor them to large audiences.

Paul: Frame our conversations as alternative readings to those common conversations on hegemony. People turn to political economy because they want a new set of questions without politicizing issues. 6th grade is a year of Orientalism. 6th grade political economy reading of "World History."

Chris: High school outreach. We need to focus on materials that will actually be used widely. Title 6 outreach programs?

Joel: High school programs are fun, but getting stuff into the curriculum is very complicated (rather than giving teacher good materials to teach). Audrey Shabbas, Arab World Resources Book, redesigning World History curriculums → Called Terrorists. Seminar at Stanford, everyone loved the Israel/Palestine session but couldn't teach in class. Portland State. We need a mechanism to get the materials to the students. Maybe not a great way to focus our resources?

Mandy: Academics in Palestine say that there is a dearth of literature in Arabic, so we should identify key texts for political economy, translate them, and publish them in a book. Seek funds for a book of readings. Link with AUB and other institutions in the region.

Sherene: If we are to link to activists, we need to think about language and the political economy of translation. Samia Mehrez, Samah Selim. There are a lot of important texts on political economy that get lost and not put on bibliographies. English speakers do not read them. Try to access political economy texts in Arabic. Teacher training is great, but we also need to think about what kind of spaces are already available and try to learn from their experiences.

Wael: Different networks are working on the same subjects. We need to identify and connect with networks in the Arab world. Social Justice: Arab NGO Networks in Beirut working on debt, millennium goals post 2015.

Firat: Activist project, Democratic Society Congress, is a leftist network in Turkey that holds sessions and translates texts. Share our experience with this network. Report on networks of people dealing with alternative economics.

Omar: ANND, attend the meetings in New York and do research for us. Arab Network for NGOS and Development. Connect with them.

Joel: Work that we can do here and work they do there cannot communicate seamlessly. Different frameworks, different assumptions. Bashir Abdel Razek on BDS: arguing this point. Use our resources to bring people from the ME here.

Paul: We want to be aware of what produces that gap (response to Joel). Models that circulate elsewhere should be brought in as well as assisted.

Joel: The question is: Do we want to work on that problem or, since most of us are based in the US, do we want to pitch our work as something happening in the US and what is our relationship to other groups?

Sherene: If people in Cairo were talking about the challenges more concretely, we would be able to address this better.

Joel: It is harder than we would imagine.

Pete: APSA (American Political Science Association), this summer, workshop on political economy. Young political scientists from the region → established political scientists. "We are going to help other people do political economy like us." This is a bad model.

Laleh: We are not hermetically sealed, despite epistemological differences, we have no audience. As we are situated in the imperial metropole, activists/groups are going to come with us for resources and connections. We can simply act as a bridge or a router.

Toby: Activism is not seamless in the region. We should think differently of the APSA model, they're opportunists. LSE (London School of Economics?), bringing in students from the region. Rutgers funds Iraqi students to come in.

Chris: Question for Adam: What would your contacts in Palestine (labor unions) want?

Adam: They're not sure, but what they're doing is building an analysis of the impact of these labor market changes in Palestine. We are not asking you to do this for us, we are doing it ourselves. Discuss and analyze the laws. At the same time, they ask people from outside to make a straight out analysis of the laws, comparative analyses, or alternatives. Wider publicity for the union, interviews. How do they view the PE of neoliberalism as it unfolds in Palestine?

Pete: Jordan—Melani Cammett, Marcia Posusney, violations of US trade agreements—is one example of a comparative approach.

Ziad: Not about creating an agenda where we drive and target. We want to leave room to be sought out in this way. (1) Research, how do we strengthen the individual and collective research agenda(s)? (2) Pushing PE within MES, taking it more seriously. (3) Political economy and the public, in media, in op-eds, in schools. (4) The question of the region → Make our work more accessible, amplify the work in the region. (5) Identify other networks working on political economy around the world. Create a framework that allows people to participate fluidly in what they are interested in.

Bassam: (1) Pedagogy: We can't get materials into curricula, so is it worthwhile to try to get these materials out in an alternative way? (2) Dealing with the region: connecting with the region and working with people in the region is a primary goal, the question is how? We want to be connected with the region for funding, resources as well...We need to match our goals and plans with our capacity. We don't want to be dependent on funding because it limits what we can do. We need to create networks for co-sponsor, co-operators.

Paul: Vernacular and subaltern, activist knowledge production sites. How can we render them visible and targetable. We should deal with forms of knowledge production on political economy that are not read as such, forms of expression, embodiment, performance.

Aaron: There is also a curatorial issue. Matters of presentation and form to consider.

Sherene: We don't talk about "the region," there is no binary. We are not located in one place, we want to be located in multiple places. We want activists to be considered social theorists. We need to get beyond the binary of scholar vs. activist. We need to pay attention to the activists.

Laleh: We shouldn't get stuck on definition.

Toby: We shouldn't underestimate our power to integrate materials into the realm of pedagogy. Melani's video, NYC board of ed sends around to teach people how to speak about the ME.

Melani: Check out the Choices Program for highschool curricula, foreign policy, international affairs. Watson Institute, Brown.

Pete: Friends in secondary education want modules they can do in class, books they can read. We want to create something they can use in the classroom. We don't want to just send a PDF.

Charles: [Visualizing Palestine](#), NGO works on decarcerating immigrants and creates flashy infographics. Materials like these can easily be used in classrooms.

Wael: Boundary between research and activism is not so large. Medical Doctors Syndicate (Egypt?) calls academics to ask them questions. Academics can play a vision for people to work on the ground.

Bassam: Pedagogy: Jad Mag "Theorizing the Gulf..." was adopted in many classrooms, so we do have an impact here. We have an easier job because we are focused on one realm (political economy). We want to do what we couldn't do, but if we are to succeed, we need to be innovative. Everyone has connections, so if we create something collective and transparent, people will use it. Building the network/community is central. We are in the process of asking members to suggest names of people to join the network.

Rafeef: We need to come up with creative ways of teaching political economy. Working with innercity highschools, using spoken word and performance poetry to teach the Middle East. Trade unions need routing, so we can serve them there.

Joel: The most important thing is not the network. The most important thing is political perspective. We should have a community of scholars and activists around the topic of political economy because we believe that PE is the key to solving issues in the world. But if we don't agree on that, then we don't have much in common. All of us work in discrete zones. Political economy: Mutual constitution of state's markets and classes? What is our view. We need a political vision, otherwise the technology is useless.

Bassam: Getting people together at the expense of perspective is not the priority. I thought we would start with a discussion of perspective.

Continued...

Chris: What is the animating position on the question: What is political economy?

Toby: We need to consider the potential limits of funding. (to Bassam) What is your vision for a perpetual project that is supported in the absence in funding?

Bassam: We don't want to be in a situation where everything we do is based on funding. Once again, 2/3 of our work is non-funded, voluntary. Organizations dependent on funding start to eliminate certain projects in order to avoid scaring away funders. Depending on funding inevitably affects your content. Volunteer-based nature is at the heart of our work. We want to make sure that we can operate on a fraction of the funding to maintain independence.

Mandy: We don't all need to agree, but we need to determine what we don't agree with.

Joel: 18th Brumaire on Abdel Fatah al-Sisi?

Presentations:

Pete Moore:

Political economy is about (1) conflict between groups, social actors, Karl Polanyi, Robert Brenner, Barrington Moore (standard political science), (2) the state, Perry Anderson, Douglas North, Wallerstein. Political economy is inclusive methodologically, Lant Pritchett on Marx: economic development in the world, developing/developed. Marcus Kurtz, Andrew Schrank, "Growth and Governance: Models, Methods, Mechanisms."

Regional war economies. Conditions of war/sustained political violence affect state revenue and trade. Jordan has been connected to every major conflict since the 1930s. The common analysis that Jordan is located in a tough neighborhood, the regime is precarious → not satisfactory. Jordan hasn't been in open combat since the 1970s. Jordan shifted to engaging in FP w/Saudi Arabia in order to get paid.

Why was Jordan in such a precarious state that it was vulnerable to Gulf incentives in the first place? To explain decision making simply as in response to incentives is not satisfying. You need to look at the history. Seeking outside funding is not a result of the "rents." Rentier state concept needs to be investigated.

War has allowed a degree of elite social cohesion since the 1930s accompanied by a fiscal decline. Jordan and Egypt have similar economic problems since the 1970s.

Unsatisfactory explanations as to why the Arab region has fallen by regional comparators and from its position in the 1970s: (1) to pin socio-economic declines and reliance on external revenue on the oil industry (2) pin historical socio-economic declines on cultural or religious patterns. Avner Grief, Timur Kuran.

- (1) We need better socio-economic data. The WorldBank and the IMF are doing this, but they have their own agenda. Better sharing mechanisms.
- (2) More institutionalized relationships between scholars and activists in the region as a means of accessing/creating data.

Sherene Seikaly:

Palestine, 1930s and 1950s.

The figure of the impoverished and colonized took the form of objects of fear and reform. The growing industrial classes were hard to access because they were either not worthy of study because they are ethically bad, or not bad enough. Julia Elyachar, Gibson-Graham: capitalism isn't an agent, it's a process. We need to work on an anthropology of concepts, have a rich debate on production, consumption, and the debate on luxury and spending.

We need to work against the right wing appropriation of Smith.

Trace Palestinian neoliberalism, rethink the notion that there was no commercial class prior to the 1950s, examine commercial and industrial coexistence. Problematize the notion that right wing policies are unchanging vis a vis Amar's work on the security state. Concept of *fahlawa* → Trickery, the footnotes of economic history.

Palestinians were engaging socialist thought among other things. The legacies of class formation: domestic and national economy are inextricable. The Arab Nahda has roots in capital accumulation and private property.

Future of the project: Forthcoming review of IJMES, not treat economic life as a still landscape that can be applied to different times.

Neoliberalism → Knowledge Production. Hanan Hunt "Economic Anthropology." Take into account the cultural and linguistic turn. Confront and challenge rather than analyze. PE allows us to build networks on the ground.

There should be a discussion about the connections between academic freedom, neoliberalism, and the policing of non-white bodies in the US.

Melani Cammett:

What is political economy? Intersect of politics/economics. PS: The application of methods and concepts of economics to political phenomena. If we are studying economic outcomes, how does politics affect them? They are inextricable. The politics of social and economic outcomes, the way that politics and economics interact, "identity politics." Research interests:

- a. Primary health care, politics of allocation vs. what is being delivered. Is there something about the organizational features that affect the quality of products?
- b. Long-term historical roots of development and social policy in the region, explanations are too generalizing (Timur Kuran). Institutions do not look the same across the Ottoman Empire or "Muslim World." James Mahony on Latin America.
- c. Survey experiments, circumstances in which people behave altruistically to other groups. Sectarianism is a politically constructed phenomenon that fluctuates over time.

Alan Richards and John Waterbury's *A Political Economy of the Middle East* → Updated by Melani Cammett and Ishac Diwani.

Good political economy texts: Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, Kiren Chaudrey's "The Myths of the Market and the Common History of Late Developers." Everything is politically constructed, such as a price. There is no abstract price in the world. Good reads: David Waldner's *State Building and Late Development*. Steffan Wertog's "Defying the Resource Curse."

Islamism and Persistent Authoritarianism texts are over. Let's look at non-state actors providing welfare goods. What do people expect from their states? How are those expectations constructed? In line with Pete, we need more data collection. What social policies are out there? How do they work in practice? Attention to environmental issues in political economy research. Cronyism → What has happened to the cronies? Empirical information about their current role.

Omar Dahi:

Notre Dame Gradschool, Heterodox economics → Mainstream economics + critiques from Marxian and Neo-Marxian theory, Keynesian & Post-Keynesian, Institutionalism, and Feminist economics. The PE department was frozen unless it was moved. The school split the department and threw heterodox and sympathizers out. Then they cancelled the new, second heterodox program.

Political economy is intersection of critiques and alternatives to neoclassical theories, a rejection of their choice of topics, and a moral critique of capitalism. PE should draw from heterodox macroeconomics and unequal exchange theories.

Interests: International trade and its impact on inhibiting economic development internally. South-South trade, the issues of new Regionalism. From 1990-2010, many (197) FTAs were signed. This activity is viewed as the rise of the south. Patterns of unequal trade are replicating themselves in the global south. But it is not simply a matter of uneven development in different places, development itself is closing off possibilities for development.

Examples of projects: Turkey and Syria. [PERI \(Political Economy Research Institute\)](#) at Amherst, Kevin Gallagher (Global Development and Environment Institute) → Looking at distribution with growth at Tufts.

Quantitative work is a dead end because we are not being informed by questions outside of macroeconomics.

[Econ4.org](#), which came out of the Occupy movement, develops videos where an existing economic idea or issue (housing, income distribution) and explain how it is described in the public realm with some success and adoption, incorporation into syllabi. The problem is funding.

Building databases, encouraging investigative economic journalism.

Joel Beinin:

Mutual constitution of states, classes and markets→this is only the beginning. Good PE should take into account local bourgeoisie and labor as well as global capital, politics and culture, technopolitics. Robert Vitalis *When Capitalists Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt*.

Dealing with global capital is necessary but problematic. Sven Beckert's *Empires of Cotton: A Global History* is a good book, but it has weakness.

You have to choose a strategy, which runs the risk of making mistakes. His paper is a version of the introduction to the book. Goal of book: talk about global capital at the expense of local capital. Gilbert Achcar's work is important to consider.

Post-WWII capitalism, Keynesian accumulation, class compromise, periphery, and developmentalism together alongside the question of neoliberal globalization.

No comprehensive book on oil in the ME. Joe Stork (Human Rights Watch, MERIP). Rentier state concept remains hegemonic. Adam's work challenges that, and also notes the contradictions inherent in capitalism.

Paul Amar:

Class formations and the creation of public/private, moral/immoral spaces is the infrastructure from which capitalism and neoliberalism operate.

Political economy research should engage vernacular and activist metaphors and take them serious, as they are enabling in terms of PE scholarship.

Interesting things for PE ("dirty, black, queer"), how the economy interacts with these things:

- (1) Figure of the family "fetish family," post-uprising authoritarian regimes. Is this launching of security regimes a way of avoiding addressing the social concerns of the uprisings that target protecting the family as a means of avoiding questions of redistribution? Family rescue discourse. Campaigns against labor migrants, or queer men in public, these are cyclical targets of state violence within these security regimes and family rescue discourse. Gendered dispossession, a "family crisis," "marriage crisis," "problems" of gender. It is not just an effort to create distracting moral panic, but actually a serious structural formation. Global trend against progressive and Marxist voices. Privatizing the state via marriage rather than a broader reform of capitalism. Omnia El Shakry, Suad Joseph, Frances Hasso, Hanan Kholoussy.
- (2) Violence entrepreneurship. Emerging middle classes in the global south participates in social and moral violence. How do they participate in public violence, symbolic violence in the media, vigilantism? How is this actually an economy of punishment that spans across societal hierarchies? Angela Davis, Bassam Haddad and Lisa Wedeen on Syria. They need to prove they are better punishers rather than better consumers. Middle class militias in Brazil too.
- (3) Baltagi effect, discourse of crony capitalism/police enforcers, thugs, dependent on grotesque masculinity, which assaults/protects. The discourse disarms working class politics in the streets. Capitalist critiques are seen as perversions of masculinity. Fear/desire of Baltaga in the

streets/Baltagi in power. Convergence of crony capitalism and security-state institutions. Crony is reauthorized and rebranded positively as in the case of Sisi. Dalia Abdel Hamid, Sherene Seikaly "Our Man Sisi."

- (4) Trafficking → Gendered elements of capitalism. Symbolically and analytic terms from the vernacular.

Toufic Haddad:

PE: Set of relationships between economics and politics, if we can accept a division. What these relationships tell us about a specific political order through the use of (1) Heterodox Marxism, (2) historical materialism, (3) material production and its impact on the societies. How do states produce and sustain their power? Institutional order, both local and national. Looking at the tensions that capitalism creates and relies upon. Who benefits, in what way, and at the expense of whom? Consciousness, ideas → from Material reality rather than the other way around.

State building in occupied territories, neoliberalism. How the World Bank justifies what it's doing in Palestine: neoliberal development and state building are technologies to push forward a hidden agenda. His research: Palestine "limited/LTD" Palestine has a number of shareholders who take dividends (not necessarily monetary), security, logistics.

Firat Bozcali:

Politics of livelihood and economies of smuggling. Civil war between Kurdish PKP and Turkey. Fieldwork began in the courtroom, working with lawyers, looking at court cases of smuggling. How does the state make and perform its claim of monopoly over legitimate movement and livelihood? How do people negotiate that claim? Smugglers negotiate livelihood with the state, guerillas, and other smugglers on the ground.

- 1) Space: how do special arrangements (e.g., wired fences, surveillance towers) relate to market standards? How boundary-making can be challenged by smugglers and their lawyers. Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* vis a vis J. K. Gibson-Graham's critique of the reification of capitalism as an expansive and powerful, pre-conceived set of economic relations and structures.
- 2) Shifting scales of economic relations and economies. Global vs. National is not a useful binary for newly emerging scales. Smugglers on Turkey's Iran border compete with Syrian goods and are run out of business.
- 3) Materiality: tracing specific materials (e.g., diesel fuel, cigs, sugar) and engaging with the material aspects of the things being smuggled and how those enable some economic interactions. Tim Mitchell *Carbon Democracy* and Arjun Appadurai's *Social Life of Things*. Oil smuggling, the easy transportability enabled Iraqi Kurdish organizing.
- 4) Forms and Items of Exchange: How different forms of exchange operate (e.g., non-monetary)? Douglas Rogers, Jane Guyer. Specific types of exchange create unique regimes of scale, budget making practices, temporality, payment patterns.

- 5) **Morality and Symbolic Work:** Moral importance of following, approaching, engaging in certain types of exchange. How do smugglers reframe smuggling as a legitimate economic activity. Legitimacy vs. Legality.

Charles Anderson:

The Great Revolt and its social roots. Approaching the 1930s from below and rethinking the British Mandate. The existing lit is elite focused and deploys tropes of national movements warring diplomatically. There was no subaltern leadership. Unpack the tropes in the lit, such as active elites and passive everyone else.

Political economy allows up to revisit the British Mandate. The acceleration of class formation and the dissolution of Palestinian peasantry. Trickle-down colonial economics. Palestinians would allegedly benefit from the trickle down of the development happening in the Jewish/Yeshuv sectors of the market vis a vis land seizure, land policy, amplified regressive tax regime system, agrarian treif. The Zionist movement didn't not have to pay highest direct tax.

Peasants were contesting all of these decisions via tax avoidance, land claims. Elites spurned popular violence, viewing it as an obstruction to their diplomatic mission. We should think of Palestine as a class society going through changes exacerbated by British Occupation. Zionists portray Palestine as a not-society. On the other side, Palestine is viewed a united whole being attacked by colonialism, which is also not perfect because it elides differences between classes.

Reframe the history of the mandate around this pivotal event. Movement to get British to accept responsibility for the Nakba. Use Australia as a model. We could work on these types of projects to assign culpability.

Discussion of Presentations (Day 1)

Toufic: What makes PE distinct from history, sociology, politics? We need to specify the PE discipline if we accept one.

Chris: Would everyone broadly agree that there are at least one or two PE approaches that are common?

Joel: Economics and political science as academic disciplines are problematic. The notion that they are separate has the goal of obstructing political economy research. We need to break down this distinction. It is not the intersection of politics and economics, this is a bad definition.

Aaron: We all agree that capitalism has a history. Political science and economics as disciplines do not accept this notion or are predicated the opposite. We also need to look at our own frameworks.

Toby: Not convinced that we accomplish anything different by making a website vs. just know each other exist. We need a set of objectives and goals. Do we want a mostly scholarly agenda? Do we want

an incoherent mission that is committed to political outcomes? If so, then we need to have a distinct political position. We still wouldn't agree on what PE means for each of us.

Paul: Defining ourselves around the term PE, but finding issues to organize around or around political demands that are brought to us might be the best way to find organize ourselves. Organizing around issues is inclusive.

Mandy: Let's not restrict ourselves to a definition. Marxist journal *Historical Materialism* took ridiculous amount of time to choose name and define itself.

Bassam: Options: (1) We can adopt a negative approach in which we determine what we are not and progressively through time we can define ourselves as something specific, (2) Or, we can say: this is what we are. Separating economics and politics is not only problematic; it is the axiom of liberal thought. The components do not actually exist. Tim Mitchell's work is useful here. What questions we can confine ourselves to or how can we define ourselves via objectives? If the temperament is negative, it's not going to happen. There are larger obstacles than intellectual or political differences. Joel and Toby: we need a framework for discussion. Let us establish one and proceed positively.

Toby: What are some conceptual or political intersections that we can work on?

Sheila: It's a question of the region we share. The Middle East is a common focus.

Sherene: **The history of PE** should be a subcategory for consideration. How does PE come out of institutional spaces? Workshop on **PE vis a vis moral philosophy intellectual history**. The history of development. Breakdown the boundaries obscuring this kind of analysis.

Laleh: It's not just about the relations between disciplines or institutions, it's about **how these relations are produced**.

Adam: The term PE is problematic. Marx was critiquing the concept. **The emphasis should be on the history**.

Some tasks to tackle: Understanding the form(s) of the state in the ME, state vs. class, critique the concept of rentier state, critique developing state.

How does the ME fit into the world market? Social categories? How do we theorize class, state, race, gender? Are they necessarily separate?

Bassam: Topics and themes will be the means of defining the group/community/project?

Firat: PE is a way of thinking of questions. What questions are we pursuing? What questions do we want to answer?

Paul: The themes need to reflect a certain political conflict. For him, Marx is about fetishization, rather than the economy. We don't need to rest on huge definitions.

Max: We want to push this as a dominant mode of analysis. It is an intellectual project to push this framework into wider use. We need to simply produce more and get it out there.

Joel: The way academia divides up knowledge is inadequate. When Adam Smith and David Ricardo talked about PE, there was no economics or PS, their point was to note that these are interrelated. Marx's critique is about a particular type of PE. There is no definition by topic, positively or negatively. It's more about how you deal with or approach a topic. We need a **definitive ethos**. Disciplines teach people to do this or do that, which is an obstacle to PE analysis. People who are not grad students should not play the dominant role.

Aaron: Common readings and debates that we care about could be a useful start. We want to design a community around what we are reading, thinking about. **Debates should be considered over disciplines.**

Sherene: We want a cross-regional conversation. 6th graders are more receptive than grad students.

Ziad: What is it that we can do collectively? What can we do with this group that we wouldn't be able to do otherwise? Concrete things will emerge the more we spend time together. We could also organize into clusters. What does history have to offer non-historians?

Toby: Subaltern studies project did not have a consensus when they started working.

Laleh: We want to be divided to a certain extent.

Bassam: What is the criterion for inclusion in the project?

Joel: **We are not happy with the way that academic disciplines divide up the world and knowledge, we are not happy with the political state of the world, and we don't have a formulated alternative, but we want to move in that direction.** That movement needs to be a radical departure.

Bassam: Is there a track to get us to address our ideas and potential? Is there a way to go in terms of the discussion?

Joel: I'm with Sherene, we should examine the historical construction of what there is now. We need to always have a historical perspective. We've all talked about the Islamic State, where did it come from? The US created it.

Toufic: Define ourselves as an ethos **that the current order of things is unjust and we reject the academic division of knowledge. Objective data. We want to prove things in objective ways.**

Joel: That's not what PE is.

Wael: You must build theories on facts, but to glorify the quantitative is the issue with economics as it stands. PE is ideology. How the hegemonic discourses that rule the ME are related to the crisis in economics and quantitative economics. The World Bank and the IMF and regional think tanks, for example, or the Economic Research Forum, responded to Arab Spring by applying their models to

account for concepts like equality. In speeches of presidents, equality was important, but 2014 WB changed their mind, genie coefficient, inequalities were not getting worse, it was getting better, a statement made on faulty data. Corruption, Cronyism.

Sherene: Calculations/Quantitatives have constraints and they hide more than they reveal. We need to be conscious of their constraints.

Max: It is no good to enshrine a qualitative quantitative divide. There are various sorts of data, none of which are objective. There is a turn in PE away from quantitative measurements, such as prices, as a result of their misuse in mainstream discourse. This does not mean they are useless tools.

Firat: Agreed. I don't agree with "objective data," but we should make data available to people. Visualization is one way to do that. Qualitative data can also be visualized.

Bassam: For contemporary issues, the historic perspective is necessary. To what extent do we want to be involved in current issues? E.g., how to rebuild post-uprisings? Let's make a collective decision to insert a bit into presentations about what everyone would like to see for this group.

DAY 2 – Saturday, 25 April 2015

Summary of April 24th (Day 1):

Joel: (From Statement) The traditional disciplinary boundaries are not sufficient to address the problems of the ME as they stand today or to understand their historical origin. PE is not the intersection of pre-existing disciplines. PE is more holistic, questioning the regional/disciplinary and the units conducive to imperial rule. Examining the mutual constitutions of states, markets and classes is an entry point for understanding any historical moment. Solidarity with groups on the ground. The political structures dominating wealth and power in the region as well as intellectual structures governing the intellectual production about the region are not sufficient.

Presentations (Day 2):

Mandy Turner:

PE is the last vestige of the scoundrel. The disciplines ostensibly addressed by PE research are a problem. Look to Gramsci and Marx alongside texts from mixed disciplines for a framework. David Harvey, Perry Anderson. We need to start with a critique of PE. We should decode social forms, demystifying power relations, puncture hegemonic ideas and common sense knowledge about the world. Avoid reifying existing terms. We should consider the conflictual encounter between social movements from above and below. This conflict creates a social formation at any given point.

Critical PE of ME historical transformation is a living process. Structures can always be arranged differently. Challenge the idea that there is no alternative (TINA). Hannah Batatu *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movement in Iraq*, Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*, Gershon Shafir *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*.

Her work aims to: provide a general context of Palestinians undergoing a continuous process of dispossession, transcend the colonizers discourse, which divided Palestinians into different groups, such as Gazans. *Decolonizing Palestinian Political Economy: De-development and Beyond* collaborative projects of scholars on Palestine looks at marginalization and dispossession in different contexts using Sara Roy's concept of de-development.

Another project: Western donors in the oPT since Oslo. Donors fail to deliver peace, but we should also decode the language of peace building and understand its relationship to domination and development. Peacebuilding as a form of counterinsurgency.

Other research: With Tariq Da'na on Palestinian elites, a PE of quasi-statehood under occupation. Economic alliances in the WB and how they inform the actions of the PA historically.

Collaborative work is most likely to yield new concepts and most interesting results. We are against the division of the world and knowledge, we're against the status quo.

Ziad Abu-Rish:

We need to practice articulating our identity as political economists. It's an internalized attitude. There is tension with PE as a target of analysis vs. a method of analysis. There's also tension about whether we have a critique of capitalism, or a particular organizational form of capitalism, such as neoliberalism. Are we looking for an alternative way to organize capitalism or an alternative to capitalism?

His research: 1946-1955, Lebanon. Debates about PE and the development model underway, the role of industry vs. trade, that everyone assumed never happened. Explain the Lebanese exception. John Waterbury's *A Political Economy of the Middle East*. History of Development in the ME. Joel's work integrates Lebanon in a way other do not. Lebanon doesn't fit the meta-narrative of the ME. Let's consider the historical roots of Lebanon's different trajectory, its role in regional trade networks. The arrangement actually came out of WWII. The elephant in the room is there is no state in Lebanon. What is the role of state institutions and how do they organize the state economy?

What is the contemporary relevance of this research? Electricity in Lebanon and deconstructing the most common narrative that electricity cuts are a result of civil war or Israeli bombardment, since the government must play a role in power cuts. Is it useful to have a meta-narrative, should we integrate or eliminate the meta-narrative? When does PE apply? Absent the Marxist historiography of Lebanon, Lebanon is not often approached by political economists. The historical perspective is paramount.

Proposals: We should learn from each other via collective feedback, create modules we can use ourselves or allow others to use, we should serve as a training center for PE research, repository for PE events around the world, push MES toward more PE, Flood MESA with PE panels (via submarines), empower PhD students.

Toby Jones:

PE should be used to challenge a conventional wisdom. Not a proponent of certain ways of thinking about PE as a unified field, speaking against the entrenched ways that liberalism and neoliberalism frame the conversation. Political and economic logic are what we should struggle against. Social History, Marx Capital I, Robert Ellis.

How should we understand the nature of the state or the durability of authoritarianism? Challenge the way that stories about rents and oil or tribes predetermine political outcomes. Look at resources such as oil or water, the extractive power of taking them out of the ground shapes social and political outcomes in the region. While there is a certain efficacy in thinking about the economy or PE, this is a disciplinary

instrument designed by people who are pursuing certain outcomes in the world. We should take into account the power of things to shape outcomes, infrastructure, verticality. Data is not the only tool. Data is constructed and must be questioned.

STS (?) or environmentally informed approach. We are concerned with questions of injustice. Disciplines matter less than a political agenda, and will complement one another if we are unified politically.

(1) the environment, climate, water, we don't engage with it seriously in the ME, (2) We have not put oil/energy at the center of what we're talking about in the region, how is that possible? let's centralize oil, (3) war (security) in the larger sense, the ME is militarized and permanently at war, (4) guard against provincialism as the middle east is not a coherent place. Why do we let that assumption stand? We can challenge centrism, peripheries. We should fight against the battle of provincializing Europe. We also can't reify the ME. We need to also situate Lebanon in the region as well as in a larger context.

Max Aji:

Why is it that people started analyzing PE to begin with? Marx → An alternative PE. It was an intellectual project, but it was also a very political project. PE can be done in lots of ways, but we're all doing PE because we are anti-capitalist. Why is PE a substitute for Marxism? The Cold War push away from Marxism, red baiting in the academy. In using PE in place of Marxism, we lose the political nature of our POV. History has given rise to a number of euphemisms for Marxism, such as development sociology.

There's a qualitative turn, no need for a distinction, but we need to think about the move away from quantitative analysis in agrarian PE. Price formation and the state fixing of prices in Tunisia as a mechanism of surplus. Prices are the basic unit of capitalism. The Market is ruled by princes. Systematic engagement with theories of value is important.

Putting together reading lists and annotated bibliographies is a really good idea. What is a Marxist reading list on Israel/Palestine? Collectively we can put this together. We want to push a specific mode of analysis as part of a specific political agenda. Running blog of everything that is published on the topic of Middle East PE. Workshops centered around specific theories or concepts, using certain time periods in the ME as a framework.

Laleh Khalili:

Ronen Shamir, on electricity is an example of a useful text to consider.

Her work: Convergence of war and PE. It's not an object or a coherent group of actors. PE: Social relations and processes that organize the world. Social phenomena that arise out of groups with access to capital and groups that do not. The instability of the field arises out of this focus on a set of social relations rather than actors or objects. Talk about silences in the field, beyond the canonical works, women's role in production and capital, Eurocentrism. How the ME relates to neighboring regions, include full nature of relationships between countries. Internal machinery of things that move at a pace we do not keep up with in the social sciences. How the virtual world works? How are the under the sea cables made? What is the PE of placing cell towers? What is the hard slow work of the "virtual world"?

Dredging and land reformation: sand mining. Desert sand is too fine, they need to get it from river banks: people end up dying.

Things to consider: Albert Hirschman, upturning many conventions about development. "Passions and Interests" ideas of rational interests become part of our vocabulary. Long historical works vs. the texture of short works. The politics of study is what draws me to it, rather than methodology or object. We can organize around political issues to supersede the boundaries of our fields.

Wael Gamal:

We don't like what's happening in the field and we want to change it.

Agree with Sherene, migrants in the Mediterranean, calling it a "tragedy" indicates that it's an accident, but this is not the case. "The Merciless Sea" as though the sea did it. Actually: it is a direct result of policy.

Start with the unsaid, what is implied, and restore it, the full picture, to really reflect reality. Neoliberal era, the social aspect of economics was sidelined for quantitative science. If you refer to states, etc., you are said to be studying ideology rather than economics. Glorifying quantitative analysis over ideology is wrong because it creates the technical illusion that something is right or wrong in PE. Also, public opinion cannot come into the discussion in the end with this approach.

This kind of thinking has been in crisis since the financial crisis and then the Arab uprisings. Generational analysis, Gramsci, as soon as the capitalist entrepreneur becomes important in the world, he creates his PE, PE of hegemony. World Bank, IMF. Decompose the hegemonic discourse, and produce an account of hegemonic discourse. The World Bank project on Tunisia and Egypt, working paper "All in the Family" → state capture, projections for Egypt got scrapped and replaced, "Jobs or Privilege" state capture → privilege, privilege was preventing the creation of jobs, stunting development. Analysis of military in Egypt, approached from the perspective of crowding out the private sector.

This is a bad approach. Businessmen and military have a very close relationship, and we should try to understand this better. Connecting what is happening in the US to what is happening in the ME (Christopher Davidson, Gulf). Books need to be translated. Samir's book was translated after 5 years. Acknowledge the language issue.

Ahmad Shokr:

Heterodox/Marxism. Looking at a social totality, that includes human interactions with the natural environment, ideas, everything. How to understand the PE of decolonization and the Egyptian state in the context of a shift from a broad international economy to a smaller, national one. Cotton industry, empire was a receding but still an important organizer of world economies. Technopolitics, railroad infrastructure in Egypt, explore how imperial relationships were built into Egypt's railroads. British monopoly was inscribed into the entire infrastructure.

Being too focused on micro-level mechanics can cause you to lose sight of larger shifts over time. Neil Brenner, Bob Jessop, what processes shape the boundaries of state power. Ontology of state power. Egypt is becoming managerially separate from this period of empire.

What makes critical PE different from older traditions? CPE shouldn't repackage the concerns of earlier scholarship, people shy away from Marxism because of decades of challenges to the foundational concepts of Marxism. CPE needs to engage with the critiques of post-structuralism, post-feminist theory. CPE should do the following: devotes greater attention to space and the creation of geographical scales, local regional national international, Henri Lefevbre, Gillian Hart, theorizing capitalism through the lens of space helps us understand how nationally formed state power comes into being, variation and difference is produced, multiplicity of capitalist development trajectories. Best CPE is sensitive to the lessons of the cultural turn. Engages questions of meaning and questions of material process and social structure. James Gelvin's *Divided Loyalties*. Rethinking exploitation in more dynamic ways.

Capitalism: a conflict between wage labor and capitalism → no, it is much more than that. Stephen Resnick, Richard Wolff J. K. Gibson-Graham, class formations and class relations as a result of surplus and who is controlling it.

For this group: a structured intellectual community for discussing works of PE that are not about the Middle East, and use them to collectively approach PE of the Middle East. Online reading groups, reading lists. Creating research that is more engaged with politics and activism in the region. Palestinian unionists, debt campaign in Egypt. Network: these are the people that know about subsidy reform, these are the existing models.

Aaron Jakes:

His paper was a review of Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*. We should read works that our Americanist colleagues read and have something to say about them in order to get people interested in what we do. Building reading lists, syllabi, annotated bibliographies. What are the resources we already have available: Website, Jadaliyya, etc., ASJ → Reviewing is denigrated as academic labor, the serious work of engaging critically with each other's work doesn't count in terms of the way academic departments view the work of their guests. This prevents serious critical engagements.

Within MES, determine the standard form of reviewing where you summarize something, pat someone on back, and suggest something needs to be taken further. Reviewing work outside of our field is a way to demonstrate that we care about the concerns of other fields.

Wrestle with the inadequacies of hegemonic narratives about Egypt. You either have a cultural studies approach or a PE approach, which mapped onto materialist studies of the state as a largely enclosed source of power, alongside a critique of politics, without paying attention to the relationships. Finance was on the brain. How these narratives are dependent on theory.

History is folded into the cotton economy in a way that much is hidden. Roger Owen (*Cotton and the Egyptian Economy*), what was it about the moment when he wrote that caused him to be preoccupied

with a division of labor? Accounting for the kinds of political possibilities that economic transitions create.

John Warner:

Marxism via activism rather than academia. Gramsci. Middle East → US Hegemony and anti-war activism.

Radical movements of the south Arabian Peninsula and Eritrea. Left ignored them in the study of the Middle East. Oman can't be the center of Arab politics, since it is not the "center of the ME" ... Anthropology (Sydney) → PE has a place in anthropology. Engels, Lewis Henry Morgan, Gayle Rubin. Ethnographic work using PE as an approach. Judith Butler.

Within the anthropology of ME, PE is more absent, (excluding Julia Elyachar, Leila Abu Lughod, gender and the haram, religion and the haram, tribes is the whole field, especially in the Arabian Peninsula. Tribesmen vs. Peasants. Sheila Carapico, Martha Mundy, were important but nothing carried on.

The state emerged as the ineffective arbiter of people's financial will. There was a great intellectual moment where everyone was thinking about how the state relates to capitalism. "Failed state" what is the state that they think is failing? There is a normative idea of a state that allows for intervention. Looking at the state ethnographically, on the ground to challenge normative conceptions of the state in reference to national social systems. Public service provisioning, move in the global south and north to privatize public services, such as water. Over 50% of households acquired water from private rather than public infrastructure. The informal sector rather than the corporate sector accumulated capital. How are markets constructed? How are prices set in a seemingly unregulated rate? Violence of the state was playing a direct role. State vis a vis emerging market based on private water.

Intellectual project of the group is good, but I want to talk about the political opportunities. Adjunctification at CUNY, raise consciousness about labor issues, hand out syllabi, make modules. Adjuncts are potential political allies, we can act through them. 60% of CUNY is adjunct, 480,000 students, go to people teaching intro classes, here's a module for you. Public universities.

Rafeef Ziadah:

Activist/Scholar, trade unionist. Study from activism. Studied Canada, sub-imperial states are interesting for looking at the ME, debates in parliament wanted ban the term "Israeli apartheid," redefining Palestinian, liberal, multicultural Canada → actually in law.

Anti-racist and feminist critiques did not cross over with PE critiques of Canada. Canadian arms and security corporations vis a vis the ME. Canada support US empire. Canadian development aid was going to security training. Canadian corporations were supplying bullets to the military in Iraq. The Canadian state was implemented in numerous ways.

“One big Muslim community,” not just what happens in the region but how it reflects on the outside, gendering, racialization. Settlement and adaptation programs. Interviews with women refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, no difference between legit armies, private security companies. PMSC, US were the cowboys, the British government were the good boys. Regulation→Voluntary code of conduct. If a claimant from Iraq makes a claim against PMSC go directly the contractors. Bananas and tea have better regulations than PMSC. Revolving door between PMSC and the military states of the ME.

Austerity in the UK and cuts to the military in the UK expanded this industry. After Iraq, these companies needed a new place to go, defending oil lines, privatizing the seas, moving into Africa, legalized floating weapons depots. Militarization of the sea. Explosion of building ports in the Gulf. Who is funding them? What is moving through them? Oil, but what else? Without understanding gulf capital, you can't understand the region.

Young scholars entering the field, Palestinian women refugees from Gaza trying to do PE economy work get told to work on Palestinian women. We should guide students. Support labor movements that are ongoing, write concise summaries of what is going on with different movements.

Shana Marshall:

Why are there so few reference texts on PE of the Middle East? PE is always reactive, so it becomes difficult to get grants or design a method to train students in the field. How do we make PE of ME possible to study in the US? PE is not usually a standalone subfield, not enough classes to validate the maintenance of a department. Bob Vitalis, the decline of PE. What is the efficacy of Signposts? What do we gain/lose?

How to read corporate earnings reports, equity reports, businesses→Military in Egypt. It's not something you would learn in a PE course. The Egyptian military acquired a number of sharers in Vodafone, the military is blocking Etisalat from setting up towers in Madinat Nasr. How does the military block non-aligned businesses? What is the role of the private sector with the military regime? The binary is not useful. These spaces are blurred. Public and private capital blurred, this is where we should be looking. Where does the military appropriate the private label? Public-private partnerships, sovereign wealth funds.

Adam Hanieh:

How do we understand the relationship between different spatial scales and our understanding of capitalism in the ME? Geography lit, Lefevbre, work against methodological nationalism. States are not self-contained sets of social relations. We need to move beyond individual countries.

Regional scale, we need to be critical of the idea “region,” but we also need to not see regions as conglomerations of nation states, but processes, regional capital and labor flows, how they affect realities in specific contexts. Example: internationalization of Gulf capital in private and state forms. Polanyis, interior bourgeoisie, they are not within a country, they transmit or are shaped integrally by processes outside of the border. State formation and accumulation in the ME, Palestinian bourgeoisie

accumulates in the West Bank, but it is also very involved in the Gulf and Jordan. Does the concept of a Palestinian bourgeoisie make sense? It is not relevant in today's ME.

The world market, how does the ME fit into global accumulation circuits? Edward Baptiste, Sven Beckert settler colonialism, food systems. Why is it that everyone is reading that? How can we learn from this moment in the 70s? Helps us grapple with the emergence of capitalism in a specific region as part of a world process. Free/unfree labor debates, is capitalism free labor and a private bourgeoisie?

War and Capitalism, Sven Beckert, the temporalities of capitalism itself. Walter Benjamin, time and capitalism. The need to understand distribution, production and consumption as part of a single circuit. Look at spatial debates in other regions. Asia, Arab integration Escrow report. ME needs to do what East Asia did.

Social categories, state, class, gender, race. Angela Davis, David McNally. Emphasis on these categories as intersecting. These are not independent or discrete.

We have more power than we think. We are attractive to students because we ask good questions and provide some kind of answer. Coherence, moving in the same direction, we can have impact.

Suggestions:

1. General theoretical debates, discuss these with people in the room, publish a Jad Mag and answer questions ;
2. Teaching, Annotated bibliographies rather than long lists of texts. Short critiques;
3. Publishing Arabic texts that we think are important.

Bassam Haddad:

Critical PE vs. PE. There are concepts within PE that are immediately contested. We need to find a balance or a gray area where we problematize to a degree, but not endlessly. Let's not assume the discourse out there is simply problematic. Using PE as a framework is not necessarily bound to make things better. Having the right tool is a good starting point, but we need to make the most out of it. Class, the tension between imperialism and class exploitation. Syria, people on the Left, even comrades, now disagree widely. We need an alternative to culturalist explanations for authoritarianism. Neoliberal proscriptions and the ruling class. The ubiquitously used and misplaced concept of corruption. Corruption is the problem: this is a neoliberal trope that denies the material base of corruption. Let's focus on the structural and structuring power of capital.

What do we do: There is no substitution to political work and collective action. Reform mends or beautifies, but it is not enough. Overhauls are also maybe impossible. Core guiding principals?

Final Discussion:

How to move forward?

MEMBERSHIP:

Will have a place on the Website for a List of Members who Accepted the Invitation

Membership? How large is the group? Structure? (2 favorite must reads with 250 words each, possible requirement for membership, submit titles of relevant books and say why they're relevant) Everyone Who Joins Writes Something, Submit the 2000 word paper, offer up a mission statement on one of the themes written up in the workshop

Restricted to invitation only. Keep small at first.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE (see separate documents for final arrangement)

Steering Committee (7 or 9 people and point people from each committee, rotating, transitional):

Need to establish a transitional Steering Committee. ASI will continue to run and fund project as an institution but we will have a semi-autonomous steering committee made up from working groups, other committees. This project to succeed only if everyone takes part and ownership.

Steering Committee approved by all attendees mainly on Joel's suggestion:

Omar, Adam, Bassam, Mandy, Shokr, Shana, Joel, Sherene, Rafeef, Wael

PP from Education and Pedagogy:

PP from Research and Engagement:

PP from Translation of Texts to/from Arabic:

PP from Connecting with Efforts on Other Regions:

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND GOALS

Volunteers to work on statement (statement of purpose and membership):

Bassam, Joel, Adam,

(to add something on imperialism)

DATES AND DEADLINES:

MESA is Deadline for Delivery?

June 1 Deadline:

--Committees to Convene in Some Way, Thematic Committees

--Essential Political Economy Readings (commit to annotation deadline following)

Friday May 1st Deadline:

--Notes on this Conference

ASI Can Spend funds By the End of September (September 30th)

Meeting prior to September 30th, end of august or beginning September/September Meeting