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MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE:
MIDDLE EAST CASES AND CHALLENGES¹



In early March 2017, a feud broke out between the Turkish and German governments. The source was a critical upcoming referendum in Turkey aimed at giving increased powers to the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Hosting the world's largest Turkish diaspora community of an estimated five million, Germany was a natural site for rallies of Erdoğan supporters in favor of a 'yes' vote on the referendum. When such gatherings scheduled for the first weekend in March in Cologne and Gaggenau were cancelled by the authorities for what were characterized as security concerns, Erdoğan further exacerbated the strained bilateral relationship by comparing such practices to those of the Nazi period. The furor over this episode had not yet calmed down the following week, when Dutch authorities prevented the Turkish Foreign Minister from flying to Rotterdam for a rally and the Minister of the Family and Social Policy from holding a similar meeting in Hamburg.

While it may still appear strange to some that foreign political figures would travel to diaspora communities to encourage support for a referendum or election in the sending state – indeed, Turks were first allowed to exercise the right to vote from abroad only in the 2014 presidential elections – the right to cast a ballot from outside the homeland and the attendant strategies of sending-state politicians to campaign beyond the borders of their national territory have become increasingly common around the world. They constitute examples, in this case particularly high-profile ones, of the phenomenon of transnational governance explored in this special issue.

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The field of transnationalism, which was, in effect, launched by the now-classic 1994 Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc work *Nations Unbound*,² began as a deliberate departure from the then-existing literature on migration which was underpinned at most levels of analysis by a clear dichotomy between the sending and receiving state. While return migration was certainly studied, it was still largely within a framework which understood migratory movement as definitive in terms of virtually all relationships, save perhaps nostalgia. With the exception of work on remittances, once left, the sending state was either ignored or deemed to have little importance in understanding the political, social, and cultural futures of the migrants.

Thus the field of transnationalism began with an implicit anti-state bias: with so much work shaped by what is now called methodological nationalism—the conception of social phenomena around or within the contours of the territorial boundaries of the nation state—scholars in this emerging area of study self-consciously eschewed not only the state level of analysis, but the state itself. Indeed, at the same time that neoliberal economics' assault on the state was leading to a celebration of the virtues of non-governmental organizations, one of the themes of the transnationalism literature was that the e/im/migrants were heroic transgressors of established territorial boundaries. Instead of being constrained by lines drawn and policed by often-coercive states, these peoples' lives and movements were seen as subverting the state system, implying a kind of liberation from the demands and oppression of governments. By embodying forms and levels of identity, which they maintained or adapted as their hypothesized transnational existence required, they were at times referred to as "deterritorialized nations."

Like all fields, the transnationalism literature has grown and developed greater nuance and sophistication with the passage of time. While there is no question that its initial successes in breaking down the conceptual barrier between sending and receiving states were, and have been, seminal to a better understanding of migrants' experiences, it is also the case that the vaunted liberation from "stateness" was more apparent than real. Regardless of the many ways in which they remain connected with the country of origin, and thus maintain a perspective anchored in or shaped by both sending and receiving societies, they are in no way deterritorialized. Indeed, they are very much subject to the vagaries of the economic, political, social, and cultural forces of the country in which they reside. In many cases, because their presence is

not legally documented, the challenges, in fact the dangers, they face play a central role in shaping their e/im/migrant experience.

One important trend that developed in the transnationalism literature concerns the types of impact that emigrants may have on the sending society or state. As noted above, economic remittances were long the most obvious form of such influence. But scholars also came to understand that there may be other significant forms of transfers, and to emphasize the importance of their impact, the term remittances is also used, although they have been termed social or political remittances. Social remittances may be thought of as the influence of the ideas and practices that migrants convey through various forms of contact with the sending society. Political remittances are closely related and are generally understood as how experiences by migrants (generally *from* countries with authoritarian political systems) with different (usually democratic) political systems may transfer (demands for) new political forms and practices to the sending society.

In addition, as the story of campaigning for the Turkish referendum in Europe described earlier indicates, the influences are not unidirectional, whether at the level of the individual or at the level of the state or diaspora community. States, particularly ones that have large diaspora communities or large communities of nationals located in countries of particular strategic, economic, or political importance, generally have either an interest in making use of these communities if they view them as a resource or in controlling them if they have reason to regard them as a security challenge.

Against this backdrop, the special issue draws on the concept of transnational governance to inquire into the ways diasporas' and states' interactions shape conceptions of power, institutions, and policies in the Arab world. Defined as a form of "steering," governance operates within a multitude of policy arenas in which public, private, institutional, and informal actors seek to organize action and shape decisions.³ With the intensification of global connections, scholarship has looked beyond state-centric models of governance to understand how transboundary networks and actors affect decision-making and transform state authority.⁴ Conceptualized as the negotiation and dispersal of authority across borders, transnational governance emerges as a "dynamic and non-linear process"⁵ in which governments and non-state actors, such as corporations, interest groups, individuals, and social movements,⁶ interact in the design of regulations and methods of deliberation.⁷ This conceptual framework shifts attention from "older models of international affairs"⁸ such as

intergovernmentalism to inquire into the complexity of formal and informal top-down and bottom-up networks that influence policymaking in an increasingly interconnected world. In this regard, a growing body of scholarship has addressed how a proliferation of what are called 'transnational governors,'⁹ such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, seek to respond to such cross-border challenges as climate change, internet, commerce, financial regulations, etc.¹⁰ Through this conceptual lens, it is possible to examine how a multiplicity of actors, ranging from states and organizations to informal coalitions, shape policy arenas through collaborative networks, but also how they may diverge in agenda setting and policy implementation.¹¹ Indeed, while cross-border governance is set in theory to enhance policy harmonization over a set of issues, the proliferation of actor strategies and cross-border regimes creates uncertainty, fragmentation and policy tensions in practice.¹²

When it comes to migration, various works have looked at how cross-border and entangled governance layers influence migration policymaking and migrant rights.¹³ Still, little attention is devoted to unpacking the nexus between transnational governance and migration through the lens of state-diaspora relations. More specifically, the two-fold dynamic through which diasporas shift the scale of governance by seeking to affect and challenge politics in the sending state, while at the same time spurring the sending state to extend its governance strategies and mechanisms beyond territorial borders, remains underexplored in this body of scholarship. In this special issue, we conceptualize the impact of migration on transnational governance as having a two-part, mutually reinforcing dynamic: How Arab states seek to "govern" their diasporas through a variety of institutions and policies; and how diasporas in turn influence governance in the sending states. From this perspective, interactions between states and their diasporas forge 'multilayered' sites of authority in which states stretch concepts of governance beyond borders while diasporas contest or reinforce state-centric governance.

As underscored, diaspora politics provides states with opportunities to harness the potential of their citizens abroad but also to extend their sovereignty and control.¹⁴ States may devise transnational development networks that enable communities abroad to participate in projects around 'codevelopment.'¹⁵ States seek to involve diasporas in both electoral and non-electoral political processes to improve citizen inclusiveness and deepen the quality of their democracies. At the same time, regimes that rely on methods of control

and co-optation to consolidate their rule may establish religious or policy institutions that would enable them to expand their authority over their diaspora communities.¹⁶ Such regimes may also seek to discourage diasporic dissent through patriotic discourses and media appeals. Leaderships may also track the activities of activists living overseas through surveillance networks.¹⁷ At the same time, diasporas influence political processes in the sending state through lobbying, organizing protests, establishing civil society platforms, or calling for voting from abroad.¹⁸ In a context of dense transworld connections, the proliferation of civil society networks, social movements, and international organizations constitute manifold avenues for diasporas to engage in politics across borders.¹⁹

In the Middle East, the Arab states have often had uneasy relationships with their diasporas. Historically, they have viewed their diasporas with caution and have perceived exile politics as a potential threat to their authoritarian stability.²⁰ Some states have established ministries that regulate and monitor their involvement, at times under the guise of harnessing their contributions to development or viewing them as alleviators of unemployment.²¹ Nonetheless, members of Arab diasporas have often questioned the national state as a dominant site of authority, and have in some cases challenged homeland authoritarianism. In the context of the Arab uprisings, Egyptian, Syrian, Tunisian, and Libyan diasporas have organized protests, established transnational civil society networks, and sought to engage in homeland politics either through campaigning for electoral rights or returning to take up political positions.²² These activities are anchored in prior transnational networks of dissent that remain largely underexplored.

Combining theory-driven, comparative, and country-based case studies, the contributions to this special issue examine questions at the heart of emigration and transnational governance in the Arab world. Focusing on the interconnected sites of authority between states and their citizens abroad, they explore how governance—as the distribution of spheres of influence, power and norms—is reconfigured through such interrelationships. The thematic issues highlighted in this special issue raise various questions for discussion: How have Arab states sought through myriad strategies to ‘manage’ their diasporas and control their transnational political space? At the same time, how have communities abroad challenged the sending state’s leadership and crafted a politics of claims making? Transcending the binary debate on the state’s politics of co-optation towards the diaspora versus

the latter's politics of contention, how is the very existence of a diaspora community, both intentionally and unintentionally, reflected in the institutional designs of the origin Arab state?

Brand's article is concerned with questions of governance, not at the level of leaderships or diaspora communities, but at a more structural level. A number of states and regions in the MENA area have had experiences with significant emigration for many decades; indeed, some for more than a century. The communities of nationals that have developed abroad, including descendants of the original emigrants, thus have a long history of relations of varying types and degrees with the sending-state governments. As a result, Brand asks, how has the very presence of such large numbers of migrants abroad affected the structures of the state? In which state structures can one in effect "read" a significant history of such population out-movement? In surveying multiple countries across the MENA region, she finds significant preliminary evidence of structural effects, both in the obvious form of special ministries and bureaus established to address diaspora concerns and challenges, but also in much less obvious ways that have implications for our understanding of regime stability and state formation.

Bruce's article addresses a critical, but to the best of our knowledge unstudied, element in the literature on transnational governance: that of the role of the sending country's "state" religion. The state in the MENA region has long been interested in extending its control over areas of law that were traditionally part of the realm of religious scholars as well as institutions such as religious endowments, schools, and universities. The result has been the gradual bureaucratization of the religious establishment. Research on migration has often discussed the importance of religion to diasporic identity and possibilities for integration in host societies, and the maintenance of ties to the sending state through the dispatch to or the temporary posting of religious scholars to support the spiritual life of the migrant communities. What Bruce explores in this paper, however, is the conscious exporting by the sending country—in this case, Morocco—of individuals charged, in effect, with promoting a "Moroccan Islam." The aim is not only to control this migrant religious field, but in so doing to attempt to inoculate it against what the *makhzen* views as the danger of radicalization by those promoting other visions and versions of Muslim belief and practice.

Fakhoury's contribution sheds light on diasporas as "soft governors" in transnational social fields. Her article maps the

transnational practices in which Egyptians in the United States engaged to sustain political ties with Egypt during the Egyptian uprising between 25 January and 11 February 2011 and its direct aftermath. US-based Egyptian activists and organizations drew on the 2011 uprising as an opportunity to renegotiate understandings of political participation, and attempted in the immediate wake of the uprising to influence governance in Egypt through establishing civil society partnerships with the homeland or lobbying for political change in the United States. Their politics of engagement took shape through digital activism, protests, advocacy, and debates on political participation. While their contributions can be credited for renegotiating the politics of participation beyond territoriality, activists' shifting allegiances in addition to Egypt's unresponsiveness to activism dealt a blow to transnational engagement after 2013. By relating activist strategies to shifting political opportunities, the article provides a broader understanding of the complex interrelationships between emigration and governance within the Arab state.

Hirt and Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad's article explores yet another aspect of transnational governance using the example of the understudied Eritrean diaspora, which accounts for one third of the total population of the country. Much of the literature on transnational governance is concerned with relations between authoritarian sending states and democratic host states. In this paper, however, Hirt and Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad paint a picture of diaspora communities in effect caught between a highly repressive home state from which Eritreans have fled on the one hand, and a series of similarly authoritarian Arab host states on the other. Their contribution explores the pressures or challenges that being caught in such a vise involves, as well as the various ways that Eritreans have sought to manage their continuing ties to home in such difficult circumstances.

In sum, this special issue contributes to addressing the current gaps in our understanding of how diasporas provide the Arab state with policy tools and opportunities to rescale its governance either by designing diaspora-oriented institutions (see Brand), externalizing its management functions (see Bruce), or "metagoverning" its diasporas (see Hirt and Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad). At the same time, this collection is an appeal for acquiring a better understanding of how diasporas—either through their mere existence or through their attempts to steer politics—affect and reconfigure structures of authority in the Arab world (see Brand and Fakhoury). Breaking away from the transnationalism literature that emphasizes migrants'

contributions on the one hand, and from streams of scholarship that concentrate on state-centric models of governance on the other, the collected articles underline the interactive dynamics between emigration and the state as an entry point to exploring governance in the Arab region as a 'multilayered' site.

NOTES

¹ This special issue developed out of papers originally presented at a panel entitled "Migration and Transnational Governance" at the annual meeting of the Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO) in Catania, Italy, 16–19 March 2016.

² Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994).

³ See Erik Kans Klijn et al, "The Impact of Governance: A Normative and Empirical Discussion," in David Levi-Faur, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 294–310; 294–95.

⁴ P.G. Cerny, *Rethinking World Politics: A Theory of Transnational Neopluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵ Sebastian Botzem and Jeanette Hofmann, "Transnational Governance Spirals: The Transformation of Rule Making Authority in Internet Regulation and Corporate Financial Reporting," *Critical Policy Studies* 4, no. 1 (2010): 18–37.

⁶ For a definition of the 'transnational' layer of governance, see William D. Coleman, "Governance and Global Public Policy" in David Levi-Faur, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Governance* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 673–85, 675.

⁷ Botzem and Hofmann, "Transnational Governance Spirals."

⁸ See Matias E. Margulis and Tony Porter, "Governing the Global Land Grab: Multipolarity, Ideas, and Complexity in Transnational Governance," *Globalizations* 10, no. 1 (2013): 65–86, 66.

⁹ Andrew Barry, "Political Situations: Knowledge Controversies in Transnational Governance," *Critical Policy Studies* 6, no. 3 (2012): 324–36.

¹⁰ Botzem and Hofmann, "Transnational Governance Spirals"; Klaus Dingwerth, "Private Transnational Governance and the Developing World: A Comparative Perspective," *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2008): 607–34; Margulis and Porter, "Governing the Global Land Grab"; William Smith, "Anticipating Transnational Publics: On the Use of Mini-Publics in Transnational Governance," *Politics and Society* 41, no. 3 (2013): 461–84.

¹¹ See, for instance, Laura Gómez-Mera, "Regime Complexity and Global Governance: The Case of Trafficking in Persons," *European Journal of*

International Relations 22, no. 3 (2015): 566–95.

¹² For a review of the literature on the complexities of transnational governance, see Margulis and Porter, “Governing the Global Land Grab,” 68.

¹³ See Tiziana Caponio and Michael Jones-Correa, “Theorising Migration Policy in Multilevel States: The Multilevel Governance Perspective,” *Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies* (2017): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1341705>; Gómez-Mera, “Regime Complexity and Global Governance”; Rahel Kunz, Sandra Lavenex, and Marion Panizzon, eds., *Multilayered Migration Governance, The Promise of Partnership* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁴ Kathryn Lum, “Operationalizing the Highly Skilled Diasporic Transnational Family: China and India's Transnational Governance Strategies,” *Diaspora Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 51–65.

¹⁵ Thomas Faist, “Migrants as Transnational Development Agents: An Inquiry into the Newest Round of the Migration–Development Nexus,” *Population, Space and Place* 14, no. 1 (2008): 21–42; Margit Fauser, “Co-development as Transnational Governance: An Analysis of the Engagement of Local Authorities and Migrant Organisations in Madrid,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 7 (2014): 1060–78.

¹⁶ See David Fitzgerald, “Inside the Sending State: The Politics of Mexican Emigration Control,” *International Migration Review* 40, no. 2 (2006): 259–93, and Jonathan Laurence, “The 21st-Century Impact of European Muslim Minorities on ‘Official Islam’ in the Muslim-Majority World,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 40, no. 4–5 (2014).

¹⁷ Fiona B. Adamson, “The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics,” *Current History* 115, no. 784 (2016): 291–97.

¹⁸ Adamson, “The Growing Importance”; Laurie Brand, “Arab Uprisings and the Changing Frontiers of Transnational Citizenship: Voting from Abroad in Political Transitions,” *Political Geography* 41 (2014): 54–63; Melissa Finn and Bessma Momani, “Established and Emergent Political Subjectivities in Circular Human Geographies: Transnational Arab Activists,” *Citizenship Studies* 21, no. 1 (2017): 22–43.

¹⁹ Sydney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁰ Philippe Fargues, “International Migration and the Nation State in Arab Countries,” *Middle East Law and Governance* 5, no. 1–2 (2013): 5–35; Tamirace Fakhoury, *Emigration from the Arab and Sub-Saharan Regions: An Inquiry into Push Factors, Policies and Diasporas’ Contributions to Development* (European University Institute, Florence: Migration Policy Centre Reports, 2012) accessed at <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC%202012%2012.pdf>.

²¹ See, for instance, Zekri A Bel Haj, CARIM Analytical and Synthetic Notes 38, *Le Cadre Sociopolitique de la Migration Hautement Qualifiée en Tunisie*

(European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, 2010), <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/13863>; A. Abdelkarim Belguendouz, CARIM Analytical and Synthetic Notes 2010/21, *Compétences Marocaines Expatriées : Quelles Politiques de Mobilisation Suivies pour le Développement du Maroc? Du TOKTEN au FINCOME* (European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, 2010), <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/13675>.

²² Adamson, "The Growing Importance."