

After the Uprisings: The Arab World in Freefall, Fragmentation or Reconfiguration?  
March 4 & 5, 2016  
Dodds Auditorium, Robertson Hall, Princeton University

## **Panel Summary**

### **Panel 7: The “New” Sectarianism?**

**Discussant:** Killian Clarke

#### **Panelists and papers:**

- Rima Majed (University of Oxford) and Sami Ofeish (University of Balamand): “Beyond Sectarianism: Challenging the Mainstream Analysis of Conflict in the Middle East”
- Diana Zeidan (EHSS): “Dependencies and sectarian reproduction in South Lebanon: reconstruction as a tool to reconfigure clientelist strategies and fragment social claims”
- Marina Calculli (George Washington University): “Taming power: Hezbollah and the Lebanese state”
- Steven Brooke (Harvard University): “Elite Appeals, Social Expectations, and Sectarian Violence: Experimental Evidence from Egypt”

This panel examined the topic of sectarianism in the Middle East, raising critical questions about the way in which sectarianism is conceptualized and operationalized in research on the region. Some papers focused on the theoretical and epistemological assumptions underlying the concept of ‘sectarianism.’ Some papers focused on how sectarianism operates in practices, specifically the way in which it has structured political coalitions and development practices in Lebanon. And some papers focused much more on the micro-level mechanisms by which sectarianism comes to shape political action. Collectively they offered a nuanced and analytical perspective on a categorization of social identity that is frequently invoked in analysis of the region but often poorly understood.

Each paper came at the question of sectarianism from a different angle. Rima Majed’s paper, for example, argued that we ought to think more critically about what we mean when we invoke sectarianism as a concept in our research. She provided a thorough review of the literature on ethnicity, in which she helpfully explicated the distinction between primordialist and constructivist understandings of ethnicity. She then made a compelling case that new research on constructivist identity from scholars like Kanchan Chandra, Rogers Brubaker, and Andreas Wimmer, in which ethnic politicization comes to be the outcome in need of explanation, may provide a promising blueprint for studying sectarianism in the Middle East.

Diana Zeidan’s research in many ways picked up on the agenda laid out by Majed and showed us in the case of Lebanon how sectarian identity comes to be constructed and reinforced through practices of development and reconstruction. By studying Hezbollah’s reconstruction activities in South Lebanon following the 2006 war, she demonstrated how sectarian identity can be produced and reproduced through practices of clientelism and non-state welfare provision, and the complex ways in which state and non-state actors may depend on and legitimize each other.

Marina Calculli's paper also examined Lebanon, but took a much more institutional and coalitional lens to explain the reasons behind Hezbollah's surprising resilience since the end of the Civil War. She drew on the methodological tools of historical institutionalism to outline a "critical juncture" from 2005 to 2008 in which Hezbollah and the Lebanese state came to agreement on areas of influence and mutual autonomy. The institutionalization of this agreement, Calculli argued, is what explains the surprising resilience of Hezbollah's *muqawama* in the years since.

Finally, Steven Brooke's paper focuses on the precise mechanisms by which sectarianism comes to be a basis for mobilization and collective action. Using a survey experiment in Egypt, he presented evidence for a paradoxical form of social desirability bias that may explain why people engage in ethnically-motivated violence. Individuals may respond to elites' calls to action due to a strong anti-minority social norm, which pressures them to act even where they may not personally hold strong anti-minority attitudes. Brooke used this experiment to explain the rise of anti-Shia violence in Egypt following the 2011 uprising.