



Panel's title : *Order Beyond Borders*

Coordinator (Affiliation, University...) : Engseng Ho (Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore)

Language : English

Topics : (Politics, History, Migration)

Panel presentation : China's One Belt, One Road project, Turkey's neo-Ottomanism, Iran's Shi'a Crescent, Russia's Eurasian Economic Union, Gulf states' sectarian outreach, and India's diaspora re-connected: together, they evince increasing regionalism within Asia. As states and societies interact beyond national borders, their interactions transform them from without. This panel contends that the social basis of this mutual transformation is not to be found in one country but in many, spread out through networks of trade, religion, kinship, and labor. Rather than seeing regionalisms as being conceived and emanating outwards from the center, this panel highlights the role of transnational networks in constituting order beyond borders.

The three papers in this panel showcase this approach through different examples. Serkan Yolacan analyzes Turkey's neo-Ottomanism from the perspective of a religious network that made its fortune across the crumbling Soviet space. His paper uses the emic category of *mahdism* to conceptualize the form of sovereignty which, though diffused through networks of business and education, can bring a state to life or hit it at its heart. Nisha Mathew analyzes India's global outreach through its diasporas and problematizes the discursive prevalence of civilizational Hinduism in this outreach. Her paper brings to fore the economic networks in the Indian Ocean and their dark sides as the workshop where Modi's dream is actually made. Ameem Lutfi analyzes Gulf regionalism from the perspective of an informal military network across the Arabian Sea. His paper problematizes the role of sectarian attachments endorsed from Gulf states as the primary motive in Gulf regionalism and centers the analysis instead on the pragmatic politics of the Baloch diaspora. Together, these three papers emphasize the constitutive role of networks in contemporary regionalisms.

Engseng Ho is Director of the Middle East Institute, and Muhammad Alagil Distinguished Visiting Professor of Arabia Asia Studies at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. At Duke University, he is Professor of Anthropology and Professor of History. He is a leading scholar of [transnational anthropology](#), history and Muslim societies, Arab diasporas, and the Indian Ocean. His research expertise is [in Arabia, coastal South Asia and maritime Southeast Asia](#), and he maintains active collaborations with scholars in these regions. He serves on the editorial boards of journals such as *American Anthropologist*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *History and Anthropology*, *Modern Asian Studies*. He is co-editor of the [Asian Connections book series at Cambridge University Press](#). He has previously worked as Professor of Anthropology, Harvard University; Senior Scholar, Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies; Country and Profile Writer, the Economist Group; International Economist, Government of Singapore Investment Corporation/Monetary Authority of Singapore. He was educated at the Penang Free School, Stanford University, and the University of Chicago.

Key words : regionalism ; diaspora ; transnational networks ; sovereignty

Participants :

1) **Name(s) (Affiliation, University...)** : Nisha Mary Mathew (Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore)

Communication's title : Diasporic Order or Nation-State: The Idea of India in the 21st Century

Language : English

Presentation : The Madison Square speech delivered by Narendra Modi in New York soon after his inauguration as Prime Minister in May 2014 marked a paradigm shift in India's international image as a key global player. Setting a precedent for his future international visits and diplomatic engagements, Modi brought the affluent American Indian, who cheered his Hollywood style antics and monologues, to the centre of nationalist politics and its twin idioms of development and a civilisational Hinduism. Anti-colonialism and an Indian-ness identified with its political territory in the subcontinent was erased to make way for an image of India purveyed by its diaspora, primarily the Gujarati diaspora and its networks of trade, capital and culture across the globe. An easy conflation, enabled by the civilisational motif of Hinduism, of pre-colonial even ancient trade networks of Gujaratis in the Indian Ocean with their global networks and power lobbies in the 21st century may serve well the interests of an Indian state that models itself after and competes with China in an international arena. Yet, such conflation has brought out ruptures and cracks in the civilisational discourse, not just in India but in places within Africa too—in India such ruptures are conceptualised in terms of caste and in Africa, race. The paper argues that a response evoked in categories such as caste and race to these developments rests as a cultural issue and deflects attention away from



the key issue at hand, that is of networks and the dark sides of their economics, including slavery and smuggling. By bringing back the focus on networks as primarily economics that contravenes borders, laws and states, and tracing their historical trajectory in the Indian Ocean in postcolonial times, the paper problematizes the civilisational discourse of Indian-ness at the heart of its contemporary global politics.

Nisha Mathew is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She received her PhD in History from Wits University, Johannesburg in 2014. Her dissertation, *Understanding Space, Politics and History in the Making of Dubai, A Global City*, is a commercial history of the city explored through the complex interface of commodity, capital and community across the Indian Ocean from the 19th to the 21st century. Many different forms of informal, even illegal trade, she illustrates, have been instrumental to the evolution of Dubai as an urban space both within and beyond empire. Likewise, the contributions of such activities as smuggling and counterfeiting to the trajectory and discourse of global urban capital in 21st century Dubai also form a key aspect of her research.

Key words : diaspora ; Indian Ocean trade; global Indian

2) **Name(s) (Affiliation, University...)** : .Serkan Yolacan (Duke University)

Communication's title : ..Sultan Without a State: Turkish Regionalism Inside Out

Language : English

Presentation : In 2016, Turkey almost imploded with a coup attempt that eventually failed. Yet only a few years earlier the Turkish leadership was vigorously charting zones of economic and cultural influence beyond its borders, a process often referred to as neo-Ottomanism. Ironically, a Muslim network led by former Turkish imam Fethullah Gulen had a significant role in both of these episodes of confident expansion and internal breakdown. Taking this irony as its departure point, this paper provides an alternative account of Turkish regionalism by centering the analysis on the Gulen community rather than the Turkish state. This network-centric view allows us to break away from explanations focused on Turkey's internal developments such as the imperial nostalgia. Instead, it foregrounds the Soviet collapse as the formative moment of Turkish regionalism, for the schools, dormitories, and businesses established by the Gulen community across the crumbling Soviet space became the channels for Turkey to establish influence beyond its borders. The community's successful expansion across the former communist space made its leader's implicit claim to be the *mahdi* (the redeemer of Islam to appear at the end of times) highly plausible in the eyes of his devout followers. By marking and crossing physical and spiritual boundaries, the former imam became a sovereign of sorts, whose power was not concentrated within a state but spread out through a world-wide network of businesses and schools. This paper considers mahdism as an emic category that expresses such diffused form of sovereignty, which can augment states from without or crumple them from within.

Serkan Yolacan is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University and a research associate at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute. His research focuses on the role of diasporas in the transformation of state and society. His dissertation project, entitled *The Azerbaijani Triangle: Order Beyond Borders Across West Asia*, employs diasporic analytics to explore transnational networks of religion, education, and business across Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey.

Key words : neo-Ottomanism ; imperial nostalgia ; mahdism

3) **Name(s) (Affiliation)** : Ameem Lutfi (Habib University)

Communication's title : Who is the proxy? Baloch regionalism through the Persian Gulf

Language : English

Presentation : The ruler of Sharjah and trained historian, Sultan Muhammad Al-Qasami, in a 2015 television interview argued that his research has shown that *Baloch*, an ethnic community from parts divided between Iran and Pakistan, were Arabs by origins. Later in the same year, the Chief of Dubai Police declared that Baloch of Persia had the right to national sovereignty. Together these statements were seen as part of an ongoing proxy-war between Sunni-Arab Gulf states and Shia-Ajami Iran. Gulf states were fanning separatist sentiments in parts of Balochistan claimed by Iran. It was placed in continuation of a popular cold-war tactic of expanding influence across borders; setting fires away from home to ensure flames do not reach national shores. Baloch diaspora, however, were constantly coming and going from shores around the Persian Gulf. Closer inspection of the two statements reveal that the intended audience for both were not separatist in Balochistan but Baloch diaspora in the Gulf. The research Sultan Qasami cited could be traced back to a Baloch imam in a military-camp mosque in Sharjah. The Police Chief's statement too came at the insistence of his Baloch subordinates in the force. Baloch, have long constituted most of the police and military ranks in the Persian Gulf. This paper reframes Persian Gulf regionalism through Baloch networks extending across the Arabian Sea. Instead of focusing on Sunni or Arab identities configured in the center and exported outside, the paper looks at how Baloch nationalist mobilize Persian Gulf regional desires to create their own political space.



Ameem Lutfi, doctoral candidate in Cultural Anthropology at Duke University. Currently, he is teaching courses in History and Anthropology at Habib University, Karachi Pakistan. Lutfi's interests broadly cohere around issue of transnational mobility, temporarily, state making and war-making. His doctoral research explores in the *longue durée* the movement of Baloch men in the Indian Ocean as military-labor under various state authorities. For his project, Lutfi conducted ethnographic and archival research in Tanzania, Kenya, Bahrain, Oman, UAE, England and Pakistan. Working at the intersection of Anthropology and History, his work asks how disconnected pasts continue to shape the coming future.

Key words : Persian Gulf regionalism ; Baloch nationalism ; transnational military networks