

# REGIONAL CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS



The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship  
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## *Report of the Consultation Workshop on Anti-Globalization Transnational Social Movement in the Arab Region*

*Dr. Amr Adly*



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Workshop on  
**Anti- Globalization  
Transnational  
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in the Arab Region***

***Dr. Amr Adly***

*Assistant Professor –*

*Department of Political*

*Science at the American*

*University of Cairo*

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# **ABOUT THE ASFARI INSTITUTE AT AUB**

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship is a regional hub of a dynamic community of academics, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and members of the general public interested in exploring traditional and innovative forms of collective actions, locally-grounded policy debates and in advancing realistic solutions to the obstacles to effective civil society and citizenship in the Arab world.

In doing so, the Institute provides training workshops and programs beside regular teaching at AUB, encourages and provides evidence-based research in areas related to political participation, accountability and good governance, produces policy/practice recommendations to improve citizens' engagement and civil society roles in mediation, deliberation and self-organization.

It also promotes public awareness of civil society and civic engagement best practices in the region through its monthly meetings and seminars and stimulates fruitful dialogue among the region's varied publics through its programmatic activities of workshops, conferences, blog and publications.

The Asfari Institute is a research center based at AUB since 2012 and is a solid partner in consolidating AUB commitment to serve, educate and engage the Lebanese society. The Institute is mobilized to develop a new minor program on civil society and collective action with relevant AUB faculties. Among its new activities is the consolidation of three new lines of work: Civil Society Law and Governance, Culture as Resistance, and Civil Society in Conflict and Post Conflict Setting.



P.O. Box 11-0236 Riad El Solh,  
Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon  
[www.aub.edu.lb/asfari](http://www.aub.edu.lb/asfari)

 +961-1-350 000-1 ext 4469

 [asfariinst@aub.edu.lb](mailto:asfariinst@aub.edu.lb)

 [ActiveArabVoices.org](http://ActiveArabVoices.org)

  [AsfariInstitute](https://www.facebook.com/AsfariInstitute)

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## ***Bridging Academia and Activism***

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*Translated by*

***Farah Al Shami***



# ***Project Details***

## **Project**

*Beyond Arab Exceptionalism:  
Transnational Social Movements  
in the Arab Region*

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The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut convened on January 23, 2019 a consultation workshop on “The Future of Anti-Globalization Social Movements in the Arab Region” in Beirut. This workshop gathered a number of academics and activists in civil society (around 20 participants) from several Arab countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and Lebanon. This intensive convening aimed to reminisce experiences that would serve in conducting a comparative analysis on Arab countries in the past three decades, especially in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions and the profound turmoil they have brought at the national and regional levels, in parallel with the dramatic changes in the global political and economic order. This entailed combining the field experiences, findings and insights of two distinct groups: activists working in the arenas of civil society and social movements, and academics. Whereas the former group is predominantly preoccupied with public affairs and issues of democratization, civil freedoms, social justice, labour rights and marginalization, the latter works on the same issues but from a more theoretical perspective and a lens that is more generic and capturing of the comparability at the international level.

This consultation workshop also aimed to converge two different schools of thought around the issues of anti-globalization and its effects (as well as the movements against it) in the region and in the global South. The first tackles it from an economic perspective while the other emphasizes the cultural aspects of it. Although these two schools of thought focus on studying the same subject of “globalization and its effects”, their main assumptions regarding the essence of the phenomenon, its principal components, and the directions of its impacts are largely different.

From an economic and political-economic perspective, globalization has been consistently and structurally defined as the phenomenon of intensification of good, service and capital flows as well as of movements of individuals as workers, consumers or service providers across national borders. Globalization has also been associated with a continuous decline in the manifestations of State sovereignty in favor of major international entities such as the international financial institutions (IFIs), the World Trade Organization (WTO) or supranational ones like the European Union, and other experiences of regional integration. This approach involved the liberal and neoclassical models which perceived globalization as an expansion of markets and opportunities, and an optimization of production-based

benefits for the sake of exchange in a market that is not cuffed by State borders and governmental regulations that undermine the efficiency of resource allocation. The same applies to the more critical approaches, being of a Nationalist or a Marxist background, which saw globalization as a mechanism imposing rules and policies that benefit specific groups between and within countries, thus magnifying the hegemony of American Imperialism in the name of market freedom and affecting the independence of not only States but also of local communities and vulnerable and marginalized social segments, on the basis of ethnicity, regionalism/territorialism, gender, and generation.

As for those who are interested in the cultural dimension of globalization, they have seen it as transnational flows as well, but those of ideas, ideologies, norms, values and patterns of human behavior and consumption. These people have converged with the earlier political-economic school on emphasizing the significant advancement in communication and transport technologies, especially with the universality of the use of internet which allowed an unprecedented intensity in connection, synchronization and mutual breakthrough between the national and the globalized, in recent human history. This context provided the chances for the universalization of concepts and norms (most but not all of them) of Western origin and usually of a liberal content since the end of the Cold War, involving human rights, representative democracy and personal freedoms. This happened in national and local contexts and through organizational networks as well as intellectual and moral ones that raised many questions about how individuals perceived of themselves and of their relationships both with each other and with their respective governments.

From here stemmed the need to bring together representatives from the two schools of thought and the different perspectives, being from academia or from the vast pool of Arab activists, and the need to recall the various faces of controversial ties between the different components of globalization, especially in the Arab world today where the region's relations with the rest of the world are being re-shaped.

# Is the current phase of globalization over?

Globalization seems to be facing today real threats of economic decline with the expansion of economic protectionism and the decay of transnational agreements and structures, whether global like the WTO or regional like the European Union (EU). It has also run into political trouble amid the declining hegemony of liberalism. What is, then, the impact of this scene on transnational social movements, and the constraints they face, especially in the global South? Do such movements exist in the Arab region in the first place? How will the global democratic crisis and the increasingly challenged universality of human rights affect the global civil society, including networks and coalitions that link the societies of the North and the South, as well as the societies within the South (especially in the Arab world and after the revolutions)? Is there still a space for anti-globalization movements, with their neo-liberal components but without identifying with the rising tide of new nationalist movements that advocate against refugees, migrant workers, and irregular immigrants? In brief, what is the future awaiting the anti-globalization movements in terms of the content of their discourse, the organizational resources that are available for them and the spheres within which they can pivot, whether within their countries of origin or beyond?

It is possible to trace the economic and technological forces behind contemporary globalization back to the end of the 1970s. This was accompanied by the progressive international liberalization of capital movement and the generalization of liberal paradigms in the 1980s and 1990s. Both dynamics entailed a re-definition of the role of the State in relation to foreign and domestic capital, along the lines of the Washington Consensus and as subject to the IFIs' conditionality. Within the same context, trade in goods and services was becoming increasingly liberalized under multilateral regulations (the transformation of the GATT into the WTO in 1994) or through multiple bilateral agreements. As economic and political liberalism has come to the forefront and stabilized with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world seemed to be entering a new phase where the importance of

national borders was diminishing and the national governments' capacities to control the flows of capital, commodity, information and data were falling back.

However, globalization has never been a "natural" or "automatic" process as its advocates have often claimed. It has rather induced inequality in favor of big concentrated capital, especially in the financial sectors which witnessed most deregulation at the national levels to the advantage of lenient international regulations that permit the largest capital mobility possible seeking high profits. Conversely, the movement of individuals has not witnessed the same level of freedom. On the contrary, more systematic restrictions were levied on it on the pretext of combatting illegal migration and taking the necessary measures against extremism and terrorism, down to maintaining the cultural peculiarities of the recipient countries. The same unevenness could be spotted on the sectorial levels. Productive sectors such as agriculture in the United States (US) and the EU kept enjoying generous state subsidies and high levels of protectionism despite liberalization in other sectors. This undermined the basis for free competition, especially for the least-developed countries in Africa and the Caribbean that rely on exporting raw agricultural material.

The anti-globalization movements picked up simultaneously with the expansion of the forces and effects of globalization. Ironically, they were – themselves – globalized in a substantial part of their transnational mobilization, assembly, organization and networking mechanisms, as well as in their discourses. These movements targeted economic globalization, as the capital market forces have set out to the benefit of multinational corporations and at the expense of local communities, workers, consumers, and marginalized social groups; which has reflected the rationale of the Left that focuses on capitalism, how to resist it, and how to get emancipated from it. These movements emerged in the 1990s during the protests that accompanied the IFIs' annual meetings and the ministerial conferences of the WTO. Many turned later into anti-imperialism movements in the

form of international demonstrations against the Iraqi war (2003); in addition to the transformation of a segment of them into anti-capitalism movements (as capitalism is globalized by definition) following the 2008 financial crisis, such as the “Occupy Wall Street” (OWS) movement, among others.

Earlier movements differed considerably from the current generation of anti-globalization movements, which leans towards the Right rather than the Left. They express social and cultural conservatism, and tuck in national borders in a way that seems to be literally reactionary by attempting to relocate capitalist development within the borders of the national States. This evokes the State’s “sovereignty” whose importance has declined over the last three decades in order to frame the production processes and keep control over their distributional repercussions, usually at the expense of migrants and foreign workers more than capital movement. The nationalist movements or the new Right are surely not the enemy of capitalism as much as they oppose the globalized versions of it or the part of capitalism that is especially linked to trading manufactured products and services. They primarily desire to resettle the capital returns within the national borders for the benefit of new economic elites and specific labor regulations that are of a nationalistic ground; as obvious in programs such as that of Donald Trump in the US, Brexit in the UK and the populist Right in France, Italy, Hungary and Poland.

Remarkably, these transformations in the anti-globalization movements took place in core capitalist countries like the US and Western Europe that originally set the rules for the global neoliberal governance in the 1980s and 1990s. This can be traced to the impacts of globalization on these countries and how it deepened inequality not only among States and geographic regions around the world but also within core countries, on a social class and regional basis. Conversely, emerging economies have generally benefited from globalization, especially countries like China whose integration in the international division of labor since the end of the 1970s supported the entry of hundreds of millions of skilled low-cost labor to the international competition, thus attracting capital inflows and technologies and the localization of manufacturing within China. However, we find that other countries, especially the least developed in Sub-Saharan Africa (and the Caribbean), have suffered further marginalization. Therefore, poverty strongly prevailed in Africa as one of the main features of

globalization. These unevenly-distributed returns of globalization have also affected the socio-political developments in core capitalism in a way that could explain the birth of the current generation of anti-globalization parties and movements.

As for the Middle East and North Africa, their share of the world’s GDP has diminished as they remained heavily reliant on exporting raw materials, namely oil and natural gas, without having a much ability to diversify into other sectors. At the same time, the economic disparities have deepened within these countries as shown in the decline of the ratio of wages to, which is an indicator of the labor share in the economy. These overall developments made the Middle East and North Africa home for losers, noting that these losses were concentrated among particular social groups such as the educated youth, who came to suffer a disproportionately high level of unemployment.

Several skeptics among the participants said that most Arab countries did not undergo any significant integration into the global division of labor since the 1990s. This rather humble record is what may explain why anti-globalization and anti-capitalist social movements never took root among marginalized communities or workers in this part of the world. Conversely, the clearest manifestation of globalization since the 1980s and 1990s (mainly for non-oil Arab countries) was perhaps the adoption of neoliberal reforms that made them subject to the IMF and World Bank conditionality. This was part and parcel of the attempts at solving these States’ financial crises by expanding on external borrowing from development institutions and then by borrowing on global financial markets. These financial crises have resulted, in the first place, from the governments’ inability to collect taxes from capital and wealth holders, whose position became increasingly privileged thanks to the liberalization of capital movement and the prioritization of attracting foreign investments.

In the Arab region, in particular, the neoliberal transformations have not led to the establishment of competitive markets domestically, nor did they lead to redefining their position in the global division of labor through trade and direct investment. Neoliberalism has rather reconfigured the role of the State to serve the interests of narrow social groups, made up predominantly of political elites and their cronies. These groups took advantage of their monopolistic control of the State authority, the fragility of civil societies, and the constrained activity

of opposing parties in order to accumulate personal wealth and transform previous public monopolies into private ones via corrupt privatization schemes. This led eventually to the merge between economic and political elites, which became known before the Arab revolutions as the non-sacred alliance between capital and the State. None of these dynamics enables the release of globalization forces domestically in the Arab societies, in a manner that might explain the absence of deeply-rooted anti-globalization movements. Even if such movements did exist, they stayed isolated from the greatest political context and largely incapable of forming broader coalitions. Lebanon in 2015 sets a good example. Whereas it witnessed the emergence of a protest movement against the domination of rentier-sectarian elites since the end of the civil war in early 1990s, this movement could not establish itself firmly among larger popular constituencies.

Some of the participants have opposed this assertion, however. This group affirmed that globalization has actually affected numerous Arab societies in light of the IFIs' conditionality, on one hand, and the universal application of neoliberal measures, in addition to its ideological hegemony, on the other. This was the global context that fostered the corruption and predation of national elites, some of whom allied themselves with foreign capital. This was especially the case with Tunisia and Morocco and how they got tied to the EU through the development of export enclave industries that favored foreign investors and their local partners at the expense of local labor and communities. Another form of harm inflicted by the forces of globalization was "odious debts" which were incurred by corrupt elites due to the lack of public accountability, and which – even worse – were partly employed to suppress their peoples. Moreover, this was the result of sustaining the same economic and political structures that impoverished large segments of the population by lowering the quality of public services and freezing public employment at the time when most of these economies could not create jobs for new labor market entrants. This could explain the emergence of branches of anti-globalization movements in some Arab countries that happen to be the most exposed to the forces of globalization such as Morocco and Tunisia. ATTAC is an example of a movement that wraps up a globalization movement of European origin, working on imposing taxes on multinational corporations, and which has later contributed to the Arab uprisings in 2011 and beyond, and then to the launch of the "odious debt campaign".

Paradoxically, some of the Arab countries are witnessing the imposition of extremely aggressive austerity measures, under the auspices of IFIs, despite their dwindling global role in the midst of the crisis of globalized capitalism. This shows the amount of marginalization facing the Arab world, that appears not to interact with the crisis of globalization since it was not an active part in it in the first place. This also certainly indicates that the more forcible re-enforcement of authoritarianism is redefining the integration patterns of Arab countries into the world's order on far worse terms for the general population, who have to suffer austerity measures and their repercussions (i.e. high inflation, reduced consumption and deterioration in public services). Additionally, they will have to grapple with the long-term impacts of increased external borrowing and what it entails as further absence of economic and social alternatives at the national levels.

Despite the disagreement among the participants regarding the level of the Arab economies' integration in the global division of labor, there was still an agreement among them that globalization – as an economic process that the world has known since the 1990s – is facing a deep crisis. This crisis however has not led to the rise of well-defined or well-shaped alternatives to neoliberal globalization. Anti-globalization movements of all sorts (being rightward or leftward) have, for long, suffered from this major issue which made them fall in the trap of demagoguery and populism. Although some think that anti-globalization movements (especially the leftist ones) do not necessarily offer complete alternatives and that, perhaps, they did not make such alternatives happen before, these movements must have brought and must be able to bring adjustments to conciliate, decelerate, and reform the diffusion and generalization of neoliberal policies and their repercussions. ATTAC may serve as a good instance that proves that anti-globalization movements (or some of them) bring up reforms and adjustments, for it is a movement that started from and crystallized in its origin with the aim of imposing taxes on multi-national corporations.

On the other hand, there have been attempts within some European countries and in the United States to revive some features of social democracy, such as the case of Bernie Sanders in the primary elections of the US Democratic Party in 2016 and 2020, or the case of the left of Syriza party in Greece (which was split later on, after the main body of Syriza had accepted the conditions of the IMF and the European and German Central Banks). Both cases presented

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substantively Keynesian solutions which advocate for the transformation of the role of the State away from “serving large capital” alone. While recognizing that the struggle against globalization (or against globalized capitalism, in particular) is a conflict that should be pursued in a globalized manner itself and that cannot be confined to one country, even if the battle was taking place in national political arenas in a world that lacks an international or global government.

Some other participants argued that anti-globalization movements are not supposed to provide alternatives in a five or ten-year period, in the first place, since this would be too ambitious and similar to “having an instrument without a musician”. They propose, conversely, that these movements are supposed to set a narrative that well depicts or constructs reality, being a narrative related to instances of individual migrants that are considered as mobile activists, to instances of a middle social class that is being subject to impoverishment, or more related to the working class. It is all mainly a question of networking and the ability to create ties between parallel social movements working on human rights or feminism - to name just a few possible areas - at the micro level and not at the level of producing macro narratives on patriarchy, capitalism or imperialism. Is there, in the Arab world, an anti-globalization movement that is capable of playing such a role without garnering the obsession of satisfying people’s chauvinism or the overstated link between the rise of social movements and the regime change? Not all of these movements need be revolutionary. Their role could be partial or sectorial and preoccupied by making marginal changes here or there, sometimes even in non-political areas, such as the cultural space (e.g. art, literature, the publishing movement, and independent media) or the social one (e.g. gender issues).

# *Globalization in Crisis: Opportunities and Constraints for Actors in the Arab World*

While the first session of the workshop focused on the economic crisis that globalization has been facing, the next session shed light on the political dimensions of the crisis of liberal globalization. In fact, the decline in the hegemony of economic (neo)liberalism contributed to the decay of political liberalism in recent years. Subsequently, the universality of human rights was undermined by several authoritarian regimes in the non-Western world, with the growing admiration for Russia and China's authoritarianism as alternative models. This happened amidst the submission of the leaders of the crisis-ridden democracies in the West, to the alleged cultural specificities that would absolve authoritarian regimes from respecting the fundamental freedoms and rights, especially in the post-revolutionary Arab context. The session raised the question of how the crisis of the global democracy and the declining hegemony of human rights will affect the global civil society, including the networks and coalitions linking the global North and the South, as well as global Southern civil societies with each other?

The participants' interventions focused on the "actors" instead of "movements" in the Arab world, in light of the limitations mentioned above and given the large variations in organizational forms of what could be considered an Arab civil society. It is worth noting that these forms could be advocacy organizations, local grassroots groups working on a single issue within a human rights framework, or other forms such as law firms, research centers, and informal networks that bring individuals, groups and organizations together under a certain cause. The participants focused specifically on the actors working in the human rights field, whose work has been, since the 1980s, largely national and not transnational at all stages. This was the case even though the framing of local political issues with a rights-based language has always involved a transnational and global dimension, to a large extent, as it has been founded on the evocation and settlement of human-rights references of Western origin and on universal trends in local contexts characterized by authoritarianism and restricted pluralism.

Human rights activism work has originated in a number of Arab countries, starting from the League in Morocco in 1972 to the opposing Human Rights Association in Tunisia and the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Egypt in the early 1980s. This shift among many leftists, nationalists, and Marxists towards embracing human rights values was due to the changes that occurred at the end of the Cold War and that made of the human rights reference a viable option. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was issued in 1948, the integration of human rights into the making of the global order only took place in the 1980s, hence creating a source of external pressure, particularly on Arab regimes. This coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union resulting in an exodus of the old Left towards civil activism while focusing on political and civil rights, in the light of the authoritarian Arab contexts that persisted after the Cold War and remained greatly unchanged except for partial and temporary political liberalization procedures in countries like Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco during the 1980s, 1990s and the early 21st century, respectively.

This reflects an Arab-specific situation very much since working on human rights in other parts of the world has rather focused on the rights of individuals in a way that echoed the dominance of economic neoliberalism. In the Arab world, however, the tenacity of authoritarianism has shaped the endemic rights-based discourse nationally and regionally, which largely put politics at the forefront. This may also be due to the fact that the Arab region, as mentioned earlier, has not witnessed a real and profound economic globalization like South America, South-East Asia, and Eastern and Central Europe, which decreased the need for direct anti-globalization human rights action in a way that keeps it more focused on political and civil rights. This does not negate the fact that these human rights actors have connected with grassroots movements of local communities and vulnerable social segments that fell victim to austerity, the collapse of public services, and the privatization of State-owned enterprises in

later stages, particularly in the first decade of the 21st century. Nonetheless, this proved to have been limited by the global economic crisis in 2008 and then the outbreak of the Arab revolutions in 2011.

Working on human rights in a number of authoritarian Arab countries, which had margins of civil action, was important in shaping aspects of public debate in a way that intersected with major political and social issues. This proved difficult to separate from the movements against Arab authoritarianisms in the build-up towards the 2011 revolutions. This discourse bore conscious and unconscious invocations of globalized political liberalism, whether regarding resecting human rights and fighting against police brutality or regarding democracy, the opposition to electoral fraud and the succession plans in Arab republics within family circles, or even regarding combatting corruption and cronyism. This series of issues was settled in national contexts to provide a broad popular constituency with an effective protest discourse that made of Arab revolutions, at their beginning, a fourth wave of democratic transformation following the first three waves of Samuel Huntington.

The ingoing great crisis of democracy seems to be eroding political and civil rights and to unleash three dynamics of degeneration: firstly, despotism and the violation of human rights in the non-Western world have become more acceptable; secondly, there is a backslide in the international human rights mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court and the African Commission. This coincided with the shrinking operations of the national mechanisms that were created in the 1990s to protect and promote human rights, as these mechanisms became subject to authoritarian regimes more than ever, which affected the universality of the idea of justice. Finally, external pressures around issues related to human rights and freedoms have largely diminished, which were somewhat important to rein in authoritarian governments in recent decades. For instance, the role of human rights commissions in Western parliaments and that of human rights legations have slid back as these stakeholders became weaker in terms of their ability to impact their governments' foreign policies. This was partly due to the rise of the Rightwing governments in Europe and the United States that either challenge the liberal values, including human rights, in general, or focus on issues like security and counterterrorism when dealing with non-Western governments.

In the face of such gloomy situation, the crisis of economic globalization and the decline of the neoliberal command may actually create greater opportunities for economic and social rights and even allow spaces for networking between the civil societies of the global North and the global South around issues such as advocating for taxing global capital, or making multinational corporations answerable to their responsibilities in protecting the environment, labor rights, and the rights of local communities. One of Tunisian participants also affirmed that the revolution in his country falls under the people's rebellion against neoliberal globalization which could be seen as an extension to the anti-globalization movement that materialized through a series of protests since Seattle 1999 and the rise of the new Left in Latin America and then in Southern Europe. Remarkable movements have already been actually formed around the political and economic identity of the citizen rather than their ethnic identity, which reflects a cosmic engagement against globalization and away from the alleged national and ethnic specificities that are often deemed as conservative, anti-democratic and inclined towards neoliberalism. Some have also given examples related to Political-Islamic movements which, despite enjoying a wide public constituency amid the deprived social groups, accept austerity measures and IFIs' conditionality as conditions for their political integration nationally and internationally. The anti-globalization movements were, in turn, committed to democracy and justice, even if they emerged in different geopolitical and economic contexts, as they expressed the same humanitarian concern which is featured in Gilbert Achcar's writings on the Arab Spring as well as in Alain Badieu and Antonio Negri's "Message to the Tunisian citizen". At the same time, however, those revolutions and protest movements that persisted after the overthrow of the authoritarian regime in Tunisia were not proletarian, according to the Marxist definition, but included intellectuals, the middle classes, and women in large social class alliances, which were demanding access to employment rather than ending the exploitation by capital. Here arose the revolutions and the subsequent Keynesian – rather than Marxist – protest movements against neoliberal globalization that no longer creates jobs, but not necessarily against capitalism as a whole.

The last session of the workshop revolved around the “what can we do?” question with the aim of coming up with recommendations or at least of identifying the best paths to follow in the local contexts. One of the first observations that were presented was that economic globalization may have been strained in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the subsequent problems in some major economic blocs such as the European Union. However, the predominance of perceptions regarding free trade and free capital movement has not declined as much, despite the skepticism about its ability to solve the development dilemmas or to lift the global economic order from its crisis. What has truly declined, though, is globalization in its both political and social dimensions, especially at the level of issues related to democracy and the social rights of workers, women, migrants and refugees fleeing conflict zones and war-torn countries.

Today, in the Middle East and North Africa, resilient and restituted authoritarian regimes are not opposed to the principles of integration into the global economy on neoliberal grounds. One of the participants brought up an instance in this regard from Bahrain where there exist attempts to transform the small Kingdom into a financial center for the Gulf, which is known for its financial surpluses, in order to stabilize the Bahraini financial system concurrently with the overly oppressive measures against the opposition and civil society, as a way to consolidate the pillars of the ruling dynasty after the 2011 uprisings. This means that globalization is running on separate tracks and is carving its new niche in favor of more repressive and even enslaving forms of neo-liberalism. Some participants do not consider, yet, that there is a way out of this situation, except by intensifying the work on a solid vertical networking between the civil society of the global North and that of the global South, and by trying to activate or protect the globalized mechanisms on human rights and fundamental freedoms, or by preserving democracy and human rights as global references which are not culture-specific.

Many participants agreed that the space for horizontal or vertical networking in the field of political or social rights has narrowed considerably. Old institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) - including governmental and non-governmental actors - have lately faced a reduced ability to influence local contexts. This weaker ability was particularly the result of the failure of the political transformation in the region after the popular uprisings of 2011 and the flagrant authoritarian reactions that were largely condoned or at least tolerated at the international level, mainly by Western governments, that were weathering their own political and economic crises. Consequently, what is deemed more possible nowadays is a horizontal networking between the Arab civil societies and a vertical networking with the North. This, on the contrary, has earned the consent of most participants who validated it by briefing others about Arab experiences such as the Egyptian campaign against “Odious Debts” which began after the 2011 revolution, as activists spearheading this campaign have confirmed to have greatly benefited from the Moroccan and Tunisian experiences.

Above all, there was a remarkable disagreement between participants about the role of social movements and civil society actors, in a more generic way in the current context. Some considered the real challenge to be in the anti-globalization and/ or anti-neoliberalism movements' capacity to reach out to local grassroots movements against the prevalent political regimes and what they have been imposing on their peoples (e.g. unfair global economic integration through indebtedness, austerity, lower expenditure on public services, corruption, and nepotism). Conversely, others considered the challenge to lie in the ability to mobilize within the available margins. This latter challenge also concerns the available spaces that are not directly political such as those related to the fields of culture, arts, gender, and youth. This allows to frame the public debate within a human rights-based narrative, hence contributing to making the long-term societal changes at the local level.