Section 8– Relazioni Internazionali

Chairs: Carla Monteleone, Vittorio Emanuele Parsi

Panel 8.6 Uses of 'common sense' in (re)ordering the Middle East

Discrete concepts and notions to interpret the world tend to emerge at different points in time and circulate across think tanks and governmental circles, so becoming fashionable and (almost) impermeable to contestation. In a word, they become 'common sense' – what Hannah Arendt saw as the result of a "mysterious process" of consultations between the "statesman" and his "army of experts". Once it is formed, the 'common sense' outlines the normative logic of decision-making in politics. However, action inspired by the 'common sense' oftentimes produces highly undesired outcomes and unintended consequences (insecurity instead of security; inequality instead of equality, etc.), leaving us in an explanatory vacuum.

With this overarching problem in mind, in this panel we seek to explore the uses of 'common sense' in politics, with a focus on the Middle East. On the one hand, we are interested in exploring its role in military interventions aimed at ordering, bordering and othering the Middle East. On the other hand, we seek to investigate how actors that are negatively affected by the 'common sense' contest and fight it. Common-sense discourses can produce self-fulfilling prophecies and (geo)political theologies of chaos, violence and insecurity. Yet, as they oftentimes acquire an autonomous force, they can be 'used' by the powerful and well as the powerless. The 'common sense' then becomes the 'paradigm' against which various political actors mobilize rival visions of the political order.

A key example is the assumption about the 'sectarian' character of Middle Eastern societies. Regardless of its interpretation in primordialist ('sectarianism') or constructivist ('sectarianization') terms, this narrative has informed and continues to inform discrete policies grounded in the unavoidability of religious/ethnic divides. In this context, what are the implications of the linguistic shift from factionalism, communitarism, confessionalism to sectarianism? Why has this assumption become so dominant? What does it capture? What does it obscure and leave aside? How do different actors use it and for what purposes? How do actors defy, hijack and subvert it?

This panel welcomes theoretical and empirical contributions on:
- the origin of common-sense narratives and their political uses;
- the strategies, practices and outputs of enforcing and contesting the 'common-sense';
- the use of 'sectarianism' and 'sectarianization' in (re)ordering the Middle East.

Chairs: Marina Calculli,Rosita di Peri