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## Oil on the Waters? Middle East Studies and Economics of the Middle East

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# Final Accepted Manuscript\_ Chapter 3

## Oil on the Waters?

### Middle East Studies and Economics for the Middle East

Karen Pfeifer

The total volume of work on the economies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region remains low in comparison to other “developing” regions of the world, but it has been growing since the 1990s. This growth is due in part to the opportunities for students from the region to receive doctoral degrees in the United States and other Western countries and in even greater measure to the dedication of resources by international agencies and organizations to the cultivation of MENA economists. However, the process entails more of a penetration by Western neoclassical economic ideas and modeling techniques into work in and on the region than it does a meeting of the minds between economists and Middle East area studies specialists.

By way of introduction, this chapter reviews the reasons for the weak links between the fields of economics and Middle East studies (MES) in the United States. It then examines the growth of the economics profession and its work in the Middle East and the shaping of this work by international and regional organizations, especially the Middle East Economic Association (MEEA) and the Economic Research Forum for the Arab World, Turkey, and Iran (ERF). The chapter concludes by considering the contested boundaries between economics and MES and how the political uprisings of 2011 were both affected by and affect the work of economists in the region, as painful economic reality and the contest of economic ideas quietly underlay the louder and more dramatic political turmoil of 2011–13.

### Weak Links between Middle East Studies and Economics

Within academia in the United States there is limited interaction between economists and departments of economics and MES. Economists tend not to be engaged in area studies, of the Middle East or elsewhere. They accounted for less than one percent of the 2,700 members of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) in 2012, and it is a struggle to attract participation by economists from MEEA, an organization formally affiliated with MESA, at the annual MESA meetings (MESA n.d.). As an affiliate of the American Social Science Association (dominated by the American Economic Association), MEEA is marginalized, with only four slots at the annual meetings: three for panels and one for a poster session. MEEA handles this creatively by arranging an additional day's meetings at a university in the same city where it usually runs nine panels over three sessions (MEEA 2012).

Economics for the Middle East was also weakly represented in US universities and colleges in the 2000s. On the positive side, 52 percent of the 105 institutions examined for this report in 2006 offered MES in some form, and 56 percent of those offered at least one course in the “political economy” of MENA in a non-economics department.<sup>1</sup> However, only 30 percent of the institutions offered an economics course through their economics departments, and only 23 percent listed an economics professor among their MES faculty. Even well-known universities with federally funded Centers for Middle East Studies (CMES) or Near East Languages Centers (NELC) listed neither an economist nor a course in economics.<sup>2</sup> The six MES centers studied intensively in 2005–6 as part of SSRC's project on the relation between MES and the social sciences evidenced a similar pattern.<sup>3</sup>

There are three reasons for the lack of interaction between economics and MES in the United States.<sup>4</sup> The first is the difference in philosophical outlook. As Jennifer Claire Olmsted (2007, 11–12) points out, and as I have experienced it, there is implicit disdain for economics on the part of MES specialists, generally because the latter are more relativistic in their understanding of the subtle historical, institutional, and cultural uniqueness of the region and tend to write off economics as naive, culture blind, and data driven. But the hostility and dismissal of the intellectual other is more potent from the side of economists, who tend to disparage area studies as too theoretically vague and empirically vacuous to be useful. Economists in the mainstream neoclassical tradition

believe that their work is a kind of science akin to the physical and biological sciences and that the essential principles of economic theory are universal (e.g., Chetty 2013). The assumptions that underlie the theory lend an elegant simplicity to economic models: individual rationality and the pursuit of self-interest are the driving forces in economic behavior everywhere and at all times, and the most efficient economic system to harmonize the interests of many rational individuals is the free market (Olmsted 2007, 6, 12).

The second reason for the MES/economics gulf is the difference in methodology. This affects not only how work is done, but what questions may be addressed, what form published output takes, and the criteria for hiring, promotion, and—in academia—tenure. The discipline of economics increasingly has come to be defined by the use of mathematical modeling and econometric techniques. As long as the economist has a large and reliable data set on which to run regressions, he or she can apply this methodology to any situation without actually knowing anything about its cultural or institutional settings. Research questions are constrained by the quantity and quality of data available, and questions that cannot be addressed with these techniques are considered either unworthy of being asked or outside the realm of economics (Olmsted 2007, 3–4).

The preferred form of publication for this work is the journal article, with journals carefully ranked. Books and book chapters are not as highly valued because they take too long to produce and are inelegant in their length and potential for intrusion of noneconomic factors in their content. The preferred format for PhD dissertations is three essays, each of which can then be revised and published as journal articles—and voilà. The processes of hiring, promotion, and tenure entail first and foremost the counting and weighing of journal articles according to their number and the ranking of the journals in which they appear. For career purposes, graduate students in economics choose their dissertation topics and shape their output to conform to these criteria rather than on the basis of the intrinsic interest of the subject matter they address. Unless it can take this form, work in area studies is routinely downgraded in economics departments, and area studies specialists are not considered attractive candidates for employment or promotion, no matter how much expertise they have in the region they study (Olmsted 2007, 15–17). Indeed, subfields related to area studies, like economic development, economic history,

and history of economic thought, have been marginalized in the profession and even eliminated entirely from many economics curricula.<sup>5</sup>

The third reason for the MES/economics gulf is the penetration of the economic programs of Western-led international agencies—the so-called Washington Consensus of neoliberal reform—into the politics and cultures of Middle Eastern societies. The most powerful and well-financed agencies are the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group, collectively known as international financial institutions (IFIs). Other international agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), take a more moderate tack but have much less international power and regional influence and much more modest resources with which to affect public policy in the region. While all of these agencies have representation in MENA countries, it was the neoliberal agenda of stabilization, liberalization, and privatization that drove the adoption of “economic reform” in the region in the 1990s and 2000s. Promoting the methods and ideological assumptions taught in Western economics as described above, these agencies treated the significant differences found in the region as deviance from the universal model of free market economics that needed correction through appropriate public policy (Olmsted 2007, 14).

The agencies pursued the neoliberal agenda in the region on two parallel tracks. One was to use their resources, mainly in the form of conditional loans for balance of payments crises and for structural adjustment and “development” projects, to pressure regional governments to adopt the necessary policies to carry out liberalization and privatization. The second was to use their resources to cultivate the generation of systematic and reliable data sets for economic research and a cohort of region-based but mostly Western-educated economists to carry out this research. Of the two economists’ organizations that work specifically on the MENA region, MEEA and ERF, the founding of the former antedated the agencies’ efforts. While there is overlap in personnel and methodology between MEEA and ERF, MEEA still carries traces of its independent roots but has little in the way of resources. ERF, in contrast, was created specifically by the international agencies and a group of region-based economists to carry out the neoclassical research agenda and to influence public policy in the direction of neoliberal reform.<sup>6</sup>

By the mid-2000s, some economists were raising questions about the negative aspects of neoliberalism in the region, but it was the shock of rising political discontent culminating in the Arab Spring of 2011 that led to a shift in the research program. In Tunisia and Egypt, for example, a strong argument can be made that neoliberal reform policies were a major contributing factor to popular discontent by not solving but likely exacerbating economic problems like corruption, unemployment, and inequality. Yet the IFIs continued to push their agenda through the Deauville Partnership after 2011 (IMF 2012b), using the language of “sustainable development” and “inclusive growth,” while poorly resourced agencies such as the UNDP and ILO, as well as trade union movements and progressive nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), struggled to propose more deeply inclusive, labor-friendly, and pro-poor alternatives. The dramatic public struggle over control of the state in the Arab Spring countries reflects but also distracts attention from a deeper, quieter, and equally pressing struggle over economic policy for the next period. This struggle defined the contested boundaries in economics for the Middle East as of 2013.

**Table 3.1. Economic Research Forum Senior Affiliates’ Sources of PhDs in Economics**

	Trustees <sup>a</sup>	Policy Affiliates <sup>b</sup>	Senior Associates <sup>c</sup>	Total
United States	9	9	15	33
United Kingdom	1	5	10	16
France		1	2	3
Germany		1		1
Canada		1		1
Moscow		1		1
Czech Republic			1	1
Turkey (METU)			1	1
Egypt (Cairo University)		4		4
Not PhD	2		2	4
No information			11	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	12	22	42	76

Source: Economic Research Forum.

*Notes:*

<sup>a</sup> Twelve of thirteen trustees are named on the ERF website, of whom two do not have PhDs.

<sup>b</sup> Nine of the twenty-two policy affiliates listed on the website are women, seven of whom are based in Cairo.

All four of the Cairo University PhD graduates are women based in Cairo.

<sup>c</sup> No education information is provided on the website for eleven of the forty-two senior associates; two do not have PhDs.

## Growth of Middle East Economics

Economics in the Middle East grew from the 1980s to the 2000s in terms of the number of economists working in the region and the magnitude of published output. The number of professionally trained economists working in the MENA region burgeoned in the 1990s and 2000s, to perhaps two thousand.<sup>7</sup> As of 2010, most of these economists were of MENA origin and were employed in the region, in Europe, or in the United States. Of the seventy-six people listed as ERF's Board of Trustees, Policy Affiliates, or Senior Associates, for example, all but nine have regional names. The emergence of this cohort is due partly to students from the region studying economics at the graduate level in the United States, in the United Kingdom, and in Europe, as shown in Table 3.1. Of those for whom education is specified, thirty-three received their PhDs in the United States, and another twenty received their degrees in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Canada (a total of 70 percent). Only five received their PhDs in the region: one from METU in Turkey and four from Cairo University. The latter are all women Policy Affiliates residing and working in Cairo. Figure 3.1 shows the predominance of Western, particularly US, economics education.

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Figure 3.1. Economic Research Forum Senior Affiliates' Source of PhDs in Economics.



Economic Research Forum 2006a. Source: Economic Research Forum.

While social science in the MENA region has been criticized for the lack of both quality and quantity of its research output (Ben Hafaiedh 2007; Ibrahim 2000), the growing production of economic knowledge about the region has been shaped by the provision of research fellowships, the promotion of economic modeling and econometric techniques, networking among scholars at conferences, and expansion of outlets for publication. Even as the international links and intraregional density of these opportunities grew from 1990 to 2010, so did the intensity of commitment to the economic philosophy and methodology described above. Below I review the types and number of research publications and then examine the organizations themselves and how they shape research agendas.

## Journals, Edited Volumes, and Dissertations as Indexed in EconLit

Knowledge generated from research on the economies of MENA is disseminated by means of journal articles, edited volumes, and dissertations. Table 3.2 shows the numbers of EconLit entries for these three categories of literature for the period 1969–2013 for regions and for selected countries. As of 2013, the MENA region appeared to be relatively less well studied. The Middle East and the Maghreb together had a total of about 820 entries for the period 1969–2013, while sub-Saharan Africa had almost 1,400 and Latin America over 26,000.

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The picture for individual countries is, on average, only slightly better. Table 3.2 shows that the six most populous countries in the Middle East, with an aggregate population of 332 million, had fewer EconLit entries (6,809) than Brazil alone (8,788), with a population of 200 million. As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the number of entries per million inhabitants, a simple measure of relative magnitude, yields a value of 43.9 for Brazil versus 20.5 for the six MENA countries, giving the impression that Brazil is studied over two times more than the six MENA countries. Among these six, Turkey alone comes out ahead of Brazil in entries per million, but a few MENA countries with smaller populations, such as Tunisia, Jordan, and especially Israel, are even better studied

by this standard.

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Figure 3.2. EconLit Entries 1969–2013, per Mn Pop 2012. EconLit.

## Journal Articles

A list of journal articles on the economics of the region is published annually in MEEA's fall newsletter; the articles are selected "with the criteria of providing regional diversity[,] . . . [and] priority is given to articles in journals that are more highly ranked." Many of the journals included in the Fall 2012 edition are highly ranked. There was one article each in *Comparative Economic Systems*, *World Development*, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics*, and *Economic Modelling*. There were two articles in *Emerging Markets Finance and Trade*, three each in *Migration Letters* and *Energy Policy*, and five in *Defense and Peace Economics*.

Equally interesting is the appearance of articles in English in region-based journals: three articles in *Iktisat Isletme ve Finans*, one in *Journal of Persian Economics and Finance*, one in *Review of Middle East Economics and Finance*, and five in *Middle East Development Journal*. Of the twenty-eight articles listed, seven concerned Turkey; seven were on migration; six each were on trade, investment and foreign exchange, energy and the environment; and four each were on conflict, the military, and economic reconstruction. A shift of emphasis can be observed since the early 2000s toward greater balance between monetary and financial topics, on the one hand, and real-sector problems, on the other.<sup>8</sup>

## Specialized Journals on Economics of the Middle East

In the 2000s, three journals dedicated to MENA economies were introduced. First, in 2000, MEEA began online publication of its proceedings journal, *Topics in Middle Eastern and North African Economies*. The main criterion for submission is that the work must be based on applied, original, empirical research. However, the range of topics is

relatively broad, reflecting MEEA's inclusive definition of economics. The journal has published papers on topics such as the economic history of Egypt, Palestinian labor migration, information technology, Islamic jurists' debates on *riba`* (interest rate), school choice in Egypt, the possible comparative advantage of Turkish exports to the European Union (EU), economic finance in Turkey, modeling the manufacturing sector in Jordan, and post-independence "visions" of development in Algeria. Turkey was the single most fully researched country in the region, indicating the importance at that time of its association with the EU, its implementation of neoliberal policies, and the growing participation of Turkish economists in MEEA (Pfeifer 2009, 15–16).

The second journal, *Review of Middle East Economics and Finance (RMEEF)*, was founded in 2003 as an independent publication but associated with MEEA. *RMEEF* called for submissions of "applied original research" in "empirically based papers." However, it defined the topics of interest more narrowly than MEEA's *Topics* journal, focusing on monetary and fiscal policy, labor and welfare economics, international trade, finance, banking and portfolio investment, and financial instability and crisis. This definition of economics fit the trend during the economic and financial boom from the early to mid-2000s toward greater emphasis on the study of finance and market transactions over the productive sectors. The journal is produced in both electronic and paper formats by the commercial publisher de Gruyter.

The third journal, *Middle East Development Journal (MEDJ)*, is edited and published by ERF. Founded in 2009 under the leadership of Ahmed Galal, its aim is "to strengthen the research community in the Middle East and North Africa," and its "ultimate goal is to provide a solid analytical and empirical base for the promotion of good policy in the region." While its focus is "applied economics," it also considers "contributions from other disciplines, especially political science and sociology." According to its website, the journal has already gained "widespread recognition," will soon "take its place among firmly established academic publications," and will be indexed by the *Journal of Economic Literature (JEL)* and EconLit. One measure of success is that four *MEDJ* articles were listed in MEEA's fall 2012 newsletter.

## Books

An examination of the numbers of books in print in English in the United States for the period 1979–2013, as displayed in Table 3.3, shows that the MENA region as a whole is about as well studied as East Asia and Southeast Asia and is better studied than sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. A country by country comparison shows that the six countries with the highest populations in the region fall, as a group, approximately in the middle of the range of absolute numbers of books. However, figure 3.3 illustrates that using the measure of books per million of the population, the countries of the MENA region are not so well studied, with the exceptions of Turkey (which is comparable to China, India, and Brazil) and Israel (which is by far the best studied country).

**Table 3.3. Number of Books in Print in English in the United States, by Region and Country, 1979–2013**

	Total Entries <sup>a</sup>		
<b>By Region</b>			
East Asia	346		
Southeast Asia Pacific	310		
South Asia	221		
Latin America	1,517		
Sub-Saharan Africa	111		
North Africa	29		
<i>Middle East</i>	<i>340</i>		
<b>By Country</b>		<b>Population (millions)</b>	<b>Entries per Million Pop.</b>
China	2,553	1,351	1.88
India	1,768	1,237	1.43
Malaysia	135	29	4.66
Brazil	293	200	1.47
Mexico	639	120	5.33
South Africa	191	51	3.75
<b>Highest Pop. MENA</b>			
Turkey	137	74	1.85
Iran	65	77	0.84
Saudi Arabia	19	28	0.68
Morocco	9	33	0.27

Egypt	70	81	0.86
Algeria	11	39	0.28
<i>Total 6 MENA countries</i>	<i>311</i>	<i>332</i>	<i>0.94</i>
<i>Well-studied countries in MENA</i>			
Israel	83	7.9	10.51
Jordan	21	6.3	3.33
Tunisia	8	10.8	0.74

Source: World Development Indicators Online.

*Notes:*

<sup>a</sup> Search was carried out with “economy” as the subject keyword.

Books about the economies of the Middle East show a broader commitment to interdisciplinarity than do journal articles. A sample of current books of interest is provided in the spring edition of MEEA’s newsletter each year. Topics of the thirty books listed in 2012, for example, included five on Islamic economics and finance and three on money, finance, and banking more generally, as money and finance was the single most popular topic during the 2000s. There were four books on oil, energy, and politics; three on the Arab uprisings; three on governance; three on Turkey; and one each on the Gulf, Iran, and Iraq. Other broad topics ranged from “the new world order” and “carbon diplomacy” to “the economic development process.” The range of this sample is similar to the range of books published in the early 2000s, but the emphasis has shifted from neoliberal reform to regionally defined problems.<sup>9</sup>

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Figure 3.3. Books per Million Pop. Books in Print database.

Books, like journals, are often sponsored by organizations and based on conferences. For example, MEEA and the economics department of the School of Business at the Lebanese American University cosponsored a fruitful conference in 1999, which anticipated issues that would come to the fore in the later 2000s. Editors representing the two organizations published the volume *Income Inequality, Poverty, and Unemployment in the Middle East and North Africa* in 2000. Similarly, MEEA sponsored

an edited six-volume series, *Research in Middle East Economics* (1997–2005)<sup>10</sup> (see Pfeifer 2009, Appendix C). MEEA has also been associated with the Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa series published by Routledge/Curzon and comprising thirteen titles (see Pfeifer 2009, “Routledge Political Economy” and Appendix D).

In contrast to MEEA, ERF has the resources to publish its own books, a series of twenty-nine titles from 1995 to 2012. About half of the books are proceedings of annual conferences; the rest are edited volumes on the focal topics of the times, from “transition” and “development of financial markets” in the 1990s to “trade policy,” “competitiveness” and “reform” of the labor market, and business regulation in the early 2000s to “governance,” “the changing role of the state,” and “labor market revisited” in 2007–9 (ERF n.d., “Books”). The last shift in focus reflects recognition of defects in neoliberal reform outcomes and the push to the fore of problems like inequality, paralleling the emergence of the ERF journal *MEDJ*.

## Dissertations

In her chapter in this volume, Laura Bier traces topical patterns in economics dissertations on the region similar to those in the books described above. In parallel with my findings about economists working on the region, she estimates that over 85 percent of these dissertations were written by scholars with regional names.

## Organizations That Shape the Production of Knowledge about Middle Eastern Economies

As of 2000, there were about one hundred interdisciplinary social science research institutes scattered across the various countries of the region (Ben Hafaiedh 2007), plus organizations based in southern Europe that specialize in Mediterranean societies and Euro-Med relations (e.g., FEMISE, ANIMA, the Robert Schuman Centre), but here I focus only on the two regionwide networks primarily for economists, MEEA and ERF. These two organizations have much in common in terms of overlapping membership, professional objectives, and training in economics, and both serve to connect economists

working outside the region with those working in it.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, both embody the tension between Middle East area studies and the discipline of economics, as virtually all participants have intimate experience with the culture and institutions of the region and are sensitive to its political issues, operating at the “contested boundaries” of economic knowledge. However, the two organizations are quite different in terms of their histories, structures, and access to resources and thus have different connections with policy makers at the national and international levels, with the latter having a strong hand in shaping how economic knowledge is produced and disseminated.

## The Role of IFIs

The World Bank and the IMF and their affiliated institutions<sup>12</sup> produce an important share of the economics literature in the form of reports on the region as a whole, on individual countries, or on issues that affect some or all regional economies (e.g., Silva, Levin, and Morgandi 2013; IMF 2012a; Khamis and Senhadji 2010; World Bank 2004). Until the early 2000s, experts employed or contracted by these organizations to conduct research and write up their results tended to be economists from various parts of the world with little connection to the region on which they were assigned to work. The assumptions were that an expert in economics or finance had technical knowledge that could be applied equally well to any part of the globe and that area studies–style acquaintance with the region was irrelevant to policy-oriented economic research.

As part of their project to spread neoclassical economic theory, econometric methodology, and neoliberal policy advice, the IFIs undertook the cultivation of region-based economists. The IMF’s Institute for Capacity Development was established in 1964 to bring officials of its member countries to Washington to receive “training in economic management,” with teaching in four languages, including Arabic. In 2011, the IMF set up its sole training program in the Arab world, the IMF–Middle East Center for Economics and Finance (CEF), in collaboration with the government of Kuwait. This center organizes courses in English and Arabic “for officials from Arab League member countries” for whom “admission is by invitation only” (IMF n.d.). As I discuss below, the World Bank took a long step beyond the IMF in shaping economic knowledge in the region when it helped found ERF in 1993. MEEA, which was founded in 1978, did not

have a hand in this process as an organization, although a number of MEEA leaders and other members have worked for the IFIs and development agencies and have had a role in the governing institutions of ERF at various times.

## MEEA's Origin, Mission, and Structure

While MEEA and ERF share a common core mission to promote economics research in the region, MEEA's unique origin and history bequeathed a broader overall mission and a less hierarchical structure. MEEA is based in the United States, and its founding was inspired by the leading Arab American economist of the time, Charles Issawi, who was elected its first president. Many of its founding members were of Iranian origin, having fled the shah's regime and arrived in the United States either as students or émigrés, and fewer were of other Middle Eastern or American origin. The majority had received their graduate degrees and worked in the United States, although members maintained their personal ties with and a vigorous intellectual interest in the region's societies and politics. Part of this heritage is MEEA's Committee on Human Rights and Academic Freedom (CHRAF), which protests against and publicizes the cases of economists and other social scientists whose right to freedom of expression or civil liberties have been curtailed by regimes in the region (see MEEA 2009, 4).

Over the 1990s and 2000s, MEEA extended its reach from mainly US academia to include a higher proportion of economists from the region, especially from Turkey. As of 2009, less than 25 percent of members resided in the United States, while 26 percent resided in Europe, and most of the rest resided in the region: 23 percent in Turkey, 20 percent in the Arab world, 4 percent in Iran, and 2 percent in other countries (MEEA 2009, 2).<sup>13</sup> The balance of leadership shifted in the same direction. Only two of the ten past presidents listed in the Fall 2012 newsletter had nonregional names, and only one of the nine members of the Board of Directors had a nonregional name.

According to its mission statement:

MEEA is a private, non-profit, non-political organization of scholars interested in the study of the economies and economics of the Middle East. The geographical term "Middle East" is used in its widest usage. Its objectives shall be: promotion of high standard scholarship, facilitation of communication among scholars through meetings and publications, and promotion of cooperation among persons and organizations committed



to the objectives of MEEA. (MEEA n.d.)

Going beyond the website's mission statement, the organization's newsletter claims that "the main objective of MEEA is to foster scholarship and to establish lines of communication among specialists interested in the Political Economy of the Middle East" (2012, 6). MEEA uses "political economy" as opposed to the narrower term "economics" to include work in historical, institutional, post-Keynesian, neo-Marxian, and other heterodox approaches, as well as the neoclassical approach that prevails in most US academic departments. Furthermore, its definition of the region is broad and fluid and in addition to the Arab world includes Israel and other Mediterranean countries such as Malta and Cyprus and, especially for the purposes of comparative work, Islamic countries in general, including those in Central and South Asia.

MEEA newsletters reach across international and interdisciplinary boundaries with their broad array of announcements of research opportunities and upcoming conferences, citations of recent journal articles and new books, and notices of its affiliated online journals, *Review of Middle East Economics and Finance* and *Topics in Middle Eastern and North African Economies*. The newsletters also report on MEEA's own and other international conferences, the activities of CHRAF, annual meetings in the United States, and announcements on behalf of ERF and other fraternal organizations.

Decision-making authority on programs and policies rests with a board of directors elected by the membership, which conducts a general assembly of the members at MEEA's annual conference in the United States. There is no central office or paid staff. Administrative responsibility is vested in a president and executive secretary, and the person who occupies the latter post usually runs for president in the next election. Similar to MESA's governance, this system provides continuity of leadership while avoiding concentration of power. Membership is open to anyone, and the membership fee is low in comparison to other US-based organizations. As of 2012, dues were US\$25 for faculty or other professionals, \$20 for students, and \$10 "for all members residing in a MEEA country" (MEEA 2012, 8).

MEEA activities are funded by membership dues and by contributions from hosting institutions for its international conferences and annual meetings in the United States. Most US-based members are employed in academic economics departments and

do not routinely participate in MES programs at their institutions. For the most part, they do not identify themselves as MES specialists as that field came to be defined in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (see Mitchell 2003a, 2003b), nor are they members of the Middle East Studies Association. MEEA became an official affiliate organization of MESA only in the late 1990s and did not use its right to hold panels at the annual MESA conference until 2013.

## ERF's Origin, Mission, and Structure

In partnership with other development agencies, the World Bank helped found ERF in Cairo in 1993 as the home base for a MENA regional network—one among several regional groupings in the World Bank–sponsored Global Development Network (GDN). ERF is registered as an NGO in Egypt and is financed by external sources (ERF n.d., “About”). The World Bank provided funding in the early years but now channels financial support through GDN and other projects. Meanwhile, ERF acquired an endowment of over \$5 million, built with \$3.2 million from the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD, a long-lived development aid agency based in Kuwait), \$1 million from the Ford Foundation, and CAD\$1 million from the Ottawa-based International Development Research Center (IDRC). AFESD, Ford, and IDRC remain partners in project development and provide additional funding on a regular basis. Three other partners, FEMISE (the European Union–sponsored program for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership), the GDN, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and State Secretariat for Education and Research also provide funding for specific contracted projects. The UNDP was a founding—but not a funding—partner and continues to provide “institutional support.” Notably absent is the overt representation of the US government.

ERF's scholarly mission is similar to MEEA's but does not include Israel or other Mediterranean countries or neighboring regions, nor does it include “political economy” in the broad sense. According to its Institutional Charter, ERF

is dedicated to promoting high quality economic research that contributes to inclusive and sustainable development in the ERF region, defined to include the Arab Countries, Iran and Turkey. To this end ERF aims to:

1. support the development of the economic research community in the ERF

region;

2. encourage the production of independent and high-quality economic (and related) research pertaining to public policy in the ERF region;
3. undertake and manage regional research projects with a view to filling knowledge gaps about the key development challenges facing the ERF region; and
4. disseminate research outcomes widely, through various channels including conferences, workshops and publications.

The phrase “inclusive and sustainable development” was added to ERF’s website in 2006. The stress on quality refers to the preferred application of econometric techniques, as illustrated below in the section discussing the shaping of research. The stress on quantity refers to the goal of increased production of knowledge on the economies of a region that has long been understudied (see Handoussa 2000 [Handoussa is ERF’s founding director]; for a separate review of the research deficits and proposals for research agendas for the region’s social scientists, see Ben Hafaiedh 2007; Ibrahim 2000). ERF’s mission also includes “building bridges between the research, policy-making and business communities in the region” through its senior associates and policy affiliates, as stated in Charter articles 30 and 32. Until the mid-2000s, this meant pursuit of neoliberal reform programs.

ERF’s governance structure is centralized and hierarchical, with some interaction between levels. Authority rests with a thirteen-member “distinguished Board of Trustees,” which appoints a managing director who supervises a professional staff of about twenty people. The board determines policies, monitors progress, approves the annual work program and budget, and appoints the Advisory Committee. It also approves nominations for the various categories of ERF affiliates, including research fellows. Serving five-year terms, seven members of the board are, in turn, elected by the research fellows at the annual conference, while the board itself appoints six of its own members: two for “regional balance” and four representing donor organizations (in 2012, the AFESD, World Bank, IDRC, and the Swiss Agency) (ERF n.d., “Institutional Charter,” arts. 7–16; ERF n.d., “Board of Trustees”). In 2012, the board included a current and a former president of MEEA.

The nine-person Advisory Committee is appointed by the Board of Trustees for indefinite terms to consult on technical issues and screen nominations for ERF affiliation in the categories described below. Advisory Committee members “are Research Fellows

with an extensive publication record, professional expertise, and strong linkages with the international community of economists” (ERF n.d., “Advisory Committee”).

Western-trained and US- and Europe-based economists wield great influence in ERF’s governance structure, but the organization has had success in recruiting region-based economists. Of the twelve board members listed in 2013, nine had regional names, as did seven of the nine Advisory Committee members. However, six of those advisors worked in the West—three in the United States, two in the United Kingdom, and one in Italy—while three worked in the region—Turkey, Tunisia, and Qatar.<sup>14</sup> The 265 affiliates who worked with ERF in 2013 are described in this way: “The group is relatively diverse, covering most countries in the region, different age groups and gender. ERF affiliates represent 20 countries in the region with 70 percent of affiliates residing in the region” (ERF n.d., “ERF Affiliates”).

The bulk of ERF’s working community is made up of economists organized in four groups. The upper two categories of membership are policy affiliates and senior associates, both of which serve to connect ERF to regional governments and influential institutions. As Table 3.1 demonstrates, a disproportionate share of the two groups had received their PhDs in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, or Europe, but only six of the sixty-four had nonregional names. Policy affiliates, of which there were twenty-two listed, “no longer engage in academic research but are active in conducting policy work . . . and are of enormous value to ERF in its effort to bridge the gap between research and policy as well as capacity building” (ERF n.d., “Policy Affiliates”).<sup>15</sup> The senior associates group

was developed to respond to the need for building bridges between the research, policymaking and business communities in the region. Senior Associates are senior professionals whose past research credentials and present position of influence provides an essential channel of communication with the policymaking community. Senior Associates are nominated by Research Fellows and/or Board members, according to criteria that takes [*sic*] into account past research track record, current position of influence, international reputation and potential contribution to the ERF mission. (ERF n.d., “Senior Associates”)

An illustration of this influence is the fact that two of the forty-two senior associates have served as prime minister and deputy prime minister for economic affairs in the post-July 3, 2013, government of Egypt, and two others had been ministers under Hosni Mubarak

and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. In addition, ERF's managing director, Ahmad Galal, took a leave of absence in July 2013 to become finance minister in the new government.

The third and fourth categories of affiliation are the research fellows and research associates, of which there were 149 and 70, respectively, in 2013. The criteria for membership are strictly related to the organization's mission of promoting research. Candidates in both cases must "originally be from the ERF region[,] . . . have a PhD or equivalent degree[,] . . . be a researcher in economics or related fields[,] . . . and submit a letter of intent and full CV including list of publications and research activities" (ERF n.d., "Become"). Candidates do not apply for admission but are nominated by existing fellows. Research fellows serve as ERF's "core constituency":

[They] are highly qualified economists, holding PhDs in economics or related fields and having published at least two articles in refereed journals. They play an important role in ongoing ERF activities such as electing the Board of Trustees, nominating new Fellows, developing and leading research programs, refereeing papers, organizing meetings, and contributing to publications. Research Fellows are the only affiliates with voting rights. Fellows are nominated by peers, screened by ERF's Advisory Committee and approved by the Board of Trustees. They are selected on the basis of a criteria proposed by the advisory committee and approved by the Board of Trustees. (ERF n.d., "Research Fellows")

Research associates stand in a kind of apprentice relationship to the guild of master craftsmen in the research fellow group. They are "promising" younger economists in the region, no more than ten years beyond their PhDs, and their admission must be vetted by the Advisory Committee and approved by the Board of Trustees.

## Shaping Research, Research Networks, and Publication of Output

Both MEEA and ERF were active in the 1990s and 2000s in mentoring budding economists, encouraging more technically sophisticated economics research (i.e., formal modeling and econometrics), and building networks of economists in the region as well as internationally and across the social science disciplines. While the two networks overlap and complement each other, they have performed these professional services somewhat differently, and ERF's support from institutional backers has given it an

increasingly compelling presence in the region in the 2000s.

MEEA has accomplished much but remains limited by its means. It had a head start insofar as it was created fifteen years earlier than ERF but now finds itself eclipsed in influence by ERF and other well-resourced organizations funded by the Gulf countries and the European Union. As MEEA's last president put it in his letter to the membership in 2012:

In sum, the MEEA has become a professional society that could successfully organize two reasonably well-attended meetings a year in different parts of the world—one that could re-locate one meeting from a country on a continent to another country on a different continent on short notice.<sup>16</sup> This is certainly a good thing, something that we could be proud of. The sad thing though is we don't do much, besides conference activities. The MEEA is still a society without a publication of its own . . . [and] we do not have the funds to partially or fully cover travel expenses of bright young scholars from the region to attend the MEEA meetings in the USA or elsewhere.

. . . We need to . . . take a more active part in the whole policy debate about the areas and paths of reform needed in MENA economies in the years ahead . . . [and to use] MEEA as a channel to get our members' voices heard by interested parties. (MEEA 2012, 3)

## Mentoring Young Scholars

MEEA had an early advantage in being based in the United States, where many students from the Middle East came to study. Its member economists have been training graduate students from the region for more than three decades, including many who would eventually become ERF affiliates. Increasingly, MEEA members also mentor graduate students in the growing universities of the region, especially in Turkey. The organization encourages younger scholars through the awarding of its annual Ibn Khaldun prize for best paper by a new PhD student. Virtually every year since 2002, it has coorganized international conferences—for example, those in Speyer, Germany, in March 2013 and in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2010—with academic or research institutions that can fund the participation of scholars who are based in the region. Using the organization's newsletter and regional contacts, MEEA leaders and members also publicize conferences of other organizations and propose panels that include younger scholars, such as at the Mediterranean Research Meetings of the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute in Florence, Italy.

ERF has several programs for mentoring young scholars and encouraging their

research in certain directions. Besides taking on recent PhD economists as research associates, it runs workshops in order to “upgrad[e] the capacity of researchers in the region”; workshop themes have included analyzing household survey data, constructing and using measurements of inequality, and writing effective policy briefs (ERF n.d., “Past Training Programs”). It runs annual competitions for research grants in several programs simultaneously. Examples of current or recent programs, each with a set of defined projects led by research fellows, are Economics of Informality in the ERF Region, Impact of Labor Market Regulations and Institutions on Labor Market Performance and Outcomes, and, jointly with Canada’s International Development Research Centre, Female Economic Empowerment (ERF 2013, 8–12).

## Defining Research Programs

MEEA does not have the means to direct research programs itself, but it informs its membership of research opportunities offered by other organizations. That MEEA leaders and some members are in the inner circles of ERF—on the Advisory Committee and among trustees and research fellows—means that they, at least as individuals, play some role in setting the research agenda. ERF, on the other hand, shapes research through several institutional vehicles.

One such vehicle is ERF’s active creation of databases for current and future research. It has announced, for example, that its Open Access Micro Data program using household surveys in a number of countries in the region will be available to the public “to enhance transparency and accountability” in public policy. For ERF’s purposes, Open Access is intended “for researchers to make use of this data to analyze questions, provide evidence and come up with solutions to current issues of our time,” such as “labor issues, human development, inequality and poverty” (Emara 2013). This kind of systematic data gathering and provision to researchers is a long-term project of the World Bank for all developing regions of the world (see Verme 2013). The potential kinks are, first, questions of privacy and the possible use of data for less noble purposes; and second, the need to synchronize data sets among various institutions in order to coordinate their work with each other and with national statistical agencies (see Emara 2013). There is also the methodological issue of what kinds of questions can be asked of a database constructed

under certain assumptions. The provision of “micro data” is related to the frequently repeated policy preference of the IFIs and ERF to promote private enterprise—micro, small, and medium enterprises in particular—as the main vehicle for economic development (see, e.g., World Bank and International Finance Corporation 2012a, 11–19; 2012b, 7–18; Fergany 2007).

As of 2013, ERF had several ongoing research programs with the ambitious multiple goals of creating data sets, building capacity for research, and using the results to influence public policy. The Research Initiative for Arab Development (RIAD), begun in 2008, is funded by multiyear grants from AFESD, the World Bank, and, as of 2012, the Swiss Agency. Its broad scope makes it hard to distinguish from other smaller-scale projects but gives it flexibility in responding to the political upheavals of 2011–13.

RIAD focuses on six themes, the result of extensive consultations with various stakeholders: inequality, regional integration, natural resources and economic diversification, environmental economics, institutional dynamics. In response to the changes wrought by the Arab Spring, the focus of the theme on institutional dynamics shifted to economic and political transformation as part of ERF’s contribution to addressing the resulting regional developments.

Under RIAD, ERF has initiated work on 22 research projects and 3 micro data initiatives. As of September 2012, 9 of those projects have been completed while 16 remain ongoing. RIAD projects typically fall under one of three major categories: Research, including data sets; Capacity Building efforts and Outreach, where research project results are disseminated and made available to a wider audience. (ERF n.d., “RIAD”)

Another complex of research programs, the Arab Spring Development Initiative (ASDI), was launched in 2013 under a three-year contract with the World Bank. It has the same goals as RIAD, to promote “open access data, knowledge creation and policy dialogue.” The categories of knowledge to be created include four themes:

The Economics and Politics of Arab Awakening which will focus on supporting the establishment of good governance in the post transition era.

. . . Inequality where the emphasis will be on what causes inequality and how it can be measured.

Employment . . . where more attention will be given to labor market regulations, labor market dynamics and adjustment to shocks and gender issues.

. . . Natural Resources and Economic Diversification which will be assessing fiscal and monetary institutions, the political economy of oil rents, and financial management of large oil windfalls, especially in relation to Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs). (ERF 2013, 19)



As with the RIAD complex, it is difficult to distinguish this research agenda from others, or from RIAD itself, but there are seemingly unlimited funds to support these projects and to finance the army of researchers needed to work on them.

## Outlets for Sharing and Publication of Research

Both MEEA and ERF organize annual conferences to encourage networking and sharing of current research. Both promote publication of the output, but ERF has the resources to do much more promoting and publishing than does MEEA.

MEEA's main vehicle for sharing work in progress are its biannual conferences: one in the United States in conjunction with the American Economic Association's annual meetings and one held in cooperation with a cosponsoring institution in the region or in Europe. Members and others are invited to submit proposals for individual papers or whole panels based on their current work and the conference content is shaped from these submissions. At the January 2013 meetings, for example, MEEA ran a total of eleven panels, including three panels plus a poster session, at the American Social Science Association venue, and eight more at a neighboring university on a separate day. Three panels were on finance, two on the Arab Spring, two on human development, and one each on macroeconomics and investment policy, the environment, Turkey, and Algeria (MEEA 2012, 3–5; on the history of MEEA conference content, see Pfeifer 2009, Table 5). The programs for these conferences are published in MEEA's newsletters and on its website. MEEA also sponsors an online proceedings journal, *Topics in Middle Eastern and North African Economies*, and has been associated with the *Review of Middle East Economics and Finance* published three times a year, and with several book series.

ERF also holds annual conferences in various regional capitals but most frequently in Cairo. Each year the conference is given a distinct theme; in 2013, it was economic development and social justice. The calls for papers invite anyone engaged in research on the economies of the region, not just its own affiliates, to submit proposals. However, papers are expected to fit into one of six categories, which are the standard grouping for ERF research output: macroeconomics, finance, international economics, labor and human development, microeconomic or sectoral studies, and institutional economics and governance. According to ERF's website:

ERF holds a highly visible annual conference that provides a platform for approximately 250 economists (and professionals in related disciplines) across the region to discuss the most pressing development challenges facing the region . . . . In addition, it offers a vehicle for networking among researchers in the region as well as with invited international speakers. Very few events in the ERF region (Arab countries, Iran and Turkey) provide such a forum. (ERF n.d., “Annual Conference”; on the history of ERF conferences, see Pfeifer 2009, Table 6)

ERF publishes five sets of research output. One is the series of books discussed above, which includes edited volumes and selected papers from the annual conferences. A second outlet is the *Middle East Development Journal*, also discussed above. The third set of ERF publications, *Reports*, “provide advice and best practice to stakeholders on the basis of policy relevant research.” (ERF n.d., “Publications”). In the early years, the *Reports* included *Economic Trends in the MENA Region* (1996–2000), a format that effectively duplicated what the World Bank and IMF cover in their volumes on the region. The *Reports* series also included *Country Profiles* (1996–2008), which were coproduced with FEMISE, one of ERF’s partners (mentioned above). The rest of the *Reports* are on subjects related to the hot topics of the times. The two most recent, for example, are about political patronage and vertical integration in the Egyptian clothing industry and the economy and the environment in the Arab world (see El-Haddad 2013; Abou-Ali and Thomas 2012).

Each document in the fourth series of publications, Policy Perspective, provides “a summary of policy-relevant research in a succinct manner . . . targeted towards a wide audience, including policymakers and development practitioners.” (ERF n.d., “Policy Perspective”). Two recent examples are “Inequality and Polarization in the Arab World” (2012) and “Egypt Post–January 2011: An Economic Perspective.” The latter, by then–managing director of ERF Ahmad Galal, describes his recommendations for action in Egypt in order to set the country on the right course in the short, medium, and long runs (see also Karshenas 1999). The policies he lays out do not differ that much from what is proposed by the IFIs (see, e.g., World Bank and International Finance Corporation 2012b).

The fifth vehicle for sharing output is ERF’s Working Papers series. Numbering almost eight hundred as of November 2013, these papers embody the hard core of research undertaken by research fellows and research associates within the large research

programs described above. The presentation of work in progress in this format is intended “to stimulate debate and encourage feedback to their authors. They represent a first step to publication in refereed journals or edited volumes.” (ERF n.d., “Working Papers”). This is where ERF’s drive to hew to neoclassical theory and econometric methodology is most clearly manifested. To illustrate, here is a sample of entries in reverse chronology in 2013:

“Impact of Exchange Rate Volatility on Macroeconomic Performance in Sudan”

“Palestinian Household Willingness and Ability to Pay for Public Utilities in the West Bank”

“Students’ Achievement in the MENA Countries: The Heyneman-Loxley Effect Revisited Using TIMSS 2007 Data”

“Competitiveness in Turkish Banking: 2002–2011”

“The Effect of Tutoring on Secondary Streaming in Egypt”

These are useful topics for research and for policy making, and they could easily be papers given at MEEA conferences as well, but this short sample of a very long list indicates the success of ERF and its partners and donors in defining the research agenda for the economics of the region.

## Contested Boundaries in Economics of and for the Middle East

“Contested boundaries” in economics of and for the Middle East are part of a global debate about sustainable and inclusive development. The IFIs came under increasingly harsh criticism for the universal application of their one-size-fits-all neoliberal programs in the 1980s and 1990s, driven by the grinding and debt-ridden “lost decade” in Latin America and the deeply troubled “transition” of the economies of Central and Eastern Europe and of the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. After the oil revenue boom of 1973–

82 collapsed, the Arab economies went into the doldrums, and IFI interventions began in this region, especially in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. However, higher growth rates did not return to the region until the 2002–7 global boom, but by that time the negative aspects of neoliberalism had become more apparent.

On a global scale, the growing criticism of IFI programs and the rise of alternative visions were expressed in official, popular, and academic form. First, the United Nations Development Programme began issuing its *Human Development Report* in 1990 as a complement, if not a competitor, to IFIs publications, “with the single goal of putting people back at the center of the development process in terms of economic debate, policy and advocacy” (UNDP n.d., “History”). The approach was based on “the need for an alternative development model due to . . . [g]rowing evidence that did not support . . . the ‘trickle down’ power of market forces to spread economic benefits and end poverty . . . [and the] human costs of Structural Adjustment Programmes” (UNDP n.d., “Origins”). As for the MENA region, the first edition of the UNDP’s *Arab Human Development Report* in 2002 received intense attention by raising questions about public economic policy and lagging social welfare (UNDP 2002).

The popular criticism of neoliberalism that arose in other developing regions of the world affected the MENA region as well. After the 50 Years Is Enough campaign, which went public in 1994 on the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the IFIs at Bretton Woods (Danaher and Yunus 1994), came the Dakar Declaration for the Total Unconditional Cancellation of African and Third World Debt in 2000, a movement that resonates loudly among activists in Tunisia and Egypt (Gamal 2011; HRHF Oslo 2012; Yahia 2013). The Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999 were a harbinger of the World Social Forum, which met for the first time in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001 and subsequently in other “developing” countries.<sup>17</sup>

Academic criticism came both from economists who had worked at the IFIs, implementing structural adjustment programs and observing their results, and from independent economists, who were left out in the cold in the 2000s. Joseph Stiglitz was vice president and chief economist of the World Bank from 1997 to 2000 when he went public with his criticism (see Stiglitz 2002 for many examples of what he deemed wrong in the IFI programs). He founded the Initiative for Policy Dialogue at Columbia

University in 2000 to open the discussion of alternatives. Jeffrey Sachs was a famous implementer of stabilization programs in countries like Bolivia, Poland, and Russia in the 1980s and early 1990s, but he abandoned that work to advocate for “sustainable development” and antipoverty programs with the UNDP’s Millennium Development Project and then became director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University in 2002.

A third quasi-insider example is the paper “The Lost Decades: Developing Countries’ Stagnation in Spite of Policy Reform 1980–1998,” presented at a GDN meeting in Cairo in 2003 by William Easterly. Affiliated with the World Bank at that time, Easterly used the Global Development Network Growth Database to show that there had been greater economic growth from 1960 to 1990 in the developing countries than in the period after 1990 and suggested that neoliberal reforms did little to address the real causes of slow growth. The independent critic Dani Rodrik at Harvard’s Kennedy School had consistently challenged the logic and questionable results of the neoliberal approach by studying the successful examples of countries that followed their own paths to growth and development in the 1990s, including large countries like China and India and smaller ones like Botswana and Sri Lanka (see Rodrik 2004; Rodrik for examples from different regions, Rodrik 2003; and for a detailed analysis of Egypt, Mitchell 2002, chaps. 7–9).

By the mid-2000s, the World Bank, and to a lesser extent the IMF, seemed to become more open to local and regional considerations that did not fit the neoliberal model. One example is the report *Unlocking the Employment Potential in the Middle East and North Africa: Toward a New Social Contract* (2004), which acknowledges that the concept of a social contract between the state and the citizenry is key to finding a viable development path in Arab political culture. Another example is *Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform* (2005), which gives credence to views of critics like Rodrik (see Rodrik 2006 for a review of the World Bank 2005 volume, where he offers suggestions for alternative approaches).

Dissenters from the neoliberal agenda began to participate in ERF and GDN research networks and make their voices heard, at least from the margin. One such voice was that of Eddy Lee, senior adviser with the International Labor Organization. At the ERF’s Twelfth Annual Conference in 2005 he described the unorthodox development

policy of post-independence Malaysia—a successful East Asian newly industrializing country, which might serve as a model to MENA countries like Egypt (ERF 2006a, 6). GDN’s edited volume *Globalization and Equity: Perspective from the Developing World* (Dinello and Squire 2005)<sup>18</sup> presented both the papers and the heated discussions that took place at its Cairo conference in January 2003, where scholars from the developing world offered independent evaluations of the impact of globalization on the countries in their regions. At the end of the conference, the six hundred participants approved the Cairo Consensus, in contrast to the Washington Consensus, which postulated, first, that increased integration in the world economy is necessary (though not sufficient) to avoid marginalization and to decrease inequality among countries but, second, that policies must be adapted to local conditions in order to minimize the negative effects of globalization (Dinello and Squire 2005, xii–xiii).

Chapter 2 of the GDN Cairo conference volume “Globalization and Inequality in the Arab Region” by Ali Abdel Gadir Ali, formerly of the Arab Planning Institute in Kuwait, argues that inequality declined in the Middle East in the 1990s, even as the region experienced slower growth than elsewhere, and that the poor benefited only half as much as the nonpoor when growth was faster. Thus, he concluded, while the developing world should adopt technology and attract capital from the world market, globalization by itself did not lead to development: “Policymakers need to forge a domestic growth strategy, relying on domestic investors and domestic institutions” to resolve conflicts arising from increased integration with the world economy (Ali 2005, 60).<sup>19</sup>

As these ideas percolated in intellectual circles in the region, they were accommodated in MEEA and ERF conferences, and the two organizations began to publish work that either implicitly or explicitly dealt with them. One implicit example was the *Egyptian Competitiveness Report*, produced by ERF in conjunction with the Egyptian National Competitiveness Council in 2006. It credits improvements in Egypt’s rankings on competitiveness indicators to neoliberal policy changes introduced under Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif in 2004. However, these successes actually worsened another indicator—Egypt’s debt to GDP ratio—and did not compensate for the decline in Egypt’s ranking on other indicators between 2000 and 2004, including health and primary education, market efficiency, and innovation. The report recommends not only

more microeconomic reforms to raise labor productivity, stimulate private investment, and increase “Egypt’s very low level of research and development” but also “an appropriate industrial strategy” with “a comprehensive set of policies” (ERF 2006b, 5). Such a program requires long-range planning and state-directed resource allocation, contradicting the neoliberal commitment to the free market and turning policy into a question of who is in control of economic planning and the allocation of resources. Similar issues were raised explicitly by Radwan and Riesco (2007), whose work “demonstrates that a simplistic dichotomy between state and market must give way to a new paradigm” in which the state plays a critical role “for bettering the lives of citizens in societies at differing stages and paths of historical development.”

The appointment of Ahmed Galal as ERF managing director in 2007 seemed to open the discussion to more challenging questions, especially in the *MEDJ*, which began under his leadership. Galal had been the executive director of the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, a think tank for Egyptian economists endorsed by Gamal Mubarak and a number of business leaders in an apparent effort to adjust public policy to overcome some of the negative aspects of neoliberalism (Rutherford 2008, 211–22). Some of his major work was on industrial policy and the relevance of the East Asian state-led development model to the Arab world (Galal 2008). More papers dealing with industrial policy, inequality, poverty, and the underlying sources of the 2011 political upheavals began to be published, including one by Dani Rodrik (2009; see also Ali 2009; Bibi and Nabli 2009; Berenger 2010; Kaboub 2013; ERF n.d., “Working Papers”).

After the Arab Spring, it appeared at first that these historical events might call forth new ways of interpreting and making policy for the economies of the Middle East—ways that would be more open to the cultural and historical sensibilities with which Middle East studies has been concerned. Several conferences and many papers attempting to grapple with the issues raised by the Arab Spring blossomed in the 2011–15 period. However, the IFIs worked assiduously to seize the reins of post–Arab Spring research, both in their own publications and under the auspices of the ERF. Without taking responsibility for neoliberalism’s negative sides, the IFIs’ burgeoning volume of output sought to define the region’s economic “problems” in ways that suited their continued promotion of hallowed neoliberal “solutions,” such as public-private

partnerships, small and medium enterprises, liberalization of trade and investment, deregulation of the business environment, and labor market flexibility.<sup>20</sup> They were grateful for the Gulf monarchies' finance of "Arab countries in transition" and welcomed the military regime in Egypt as well as the electoral reinstatement of politicians from the pre-uprising regime in Tunisia. As of mid-2015, proposals for alternative paths to reform of the old economic regimes were being overshadowed by the restoration of neoliberalism dressed in inclusive garb and purporting to serve, however indirectly, the needs for bread, freedom, and social justice (for further elaboration, see Pfeifer 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

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1. I carried out an online search with the keywords "courses in economics + Middle East" and "courses in Middle East economics," in addition to conducting an email survey of MESA members listed under "economics" or "political economy" in the member directory (see Pfeifer 2009, Table 1).
  2. In 2006, these universities included Boston, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Indiana, Johns Hopkins, Michigan, New York, Princeton, Rochester, Texas, and Yale. A similar pattern was found for the eighteen universities listed in the document *Africa and Middle East: Abstracts*, compiling abstracts of "area and international studies projects, language training, and outreach activities to be conducted by NRC and/or FLAS grantee institutions during the FY 03–05" (US Department of Education n.d., n.p.).

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3. At one school, an affiliated professor belonged to a regular economics department and five others worked in resource economics (a separate and less prestigious department). Only one center listed a course on the economies of the Middle East *per se*, taught once per year. Another had three courses (of which two were on agriculture), each including about 25 percent content on the Middle East. Four other centers listed one course each on political economy, development, or finance in the Middle East taught by professors in political science or international relations but not in economics (pers. comm., Elizabeth Anderson, project researcher, SSRC, April 18, 2006).
  4. The argument advanced here is developed cogently but at greater length by Jennifer Olmsted in a paper she contributed to the conference sponsored by SSRC in 2007 on the relation of the social sciences to MES (Olmsted 2007).
  5. I know this from having gone through the process myself—as department chair supervising hiring and participating in tenure reviews and as an outside reviewer evaluating departments and programs at other institutions.
  6. I learned this when I visited ERF’s office and library in 1993 soon after its founding and spoke with founding executive director Heba Handoussa. The ERF website specifies that the World Bank was a main founder and initial funder of ERF but that it now provides funds only for defined projects (ERF n.d., “Partners and Donors”).
  7. This is my estimate based on affiliation with MEEA of about 1,000 people over these years, counting turnover (not all dues-paying members at once) and another 1,000 with ERF, with 265 affiliates in 2012 in its four categories with term limits.
  8. In 2006, I examined a sample of English-language articles about MENA economies in peer-reviewed journals indexed in the *Journal of Economic Literature* from 2000 to 2005. About half were on economics and finance in the more restricted disciplinary sense, illustrating growing specialization in economic modeling and finance, and half were on institutional and real-sector research by other social scientists (see Pfeifer 2009, Table 4 and Appendix A). That sample showed that from two to ten articles related to MENA economies appeared in each of ten well-ranked economics journals and one to three articles appeared in eighteen interdisciplinary journals (Pfeifer 2009, 13–14).



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9. In 2006, I examined books published in English by academic publishers on Middle East economies from 2000 to 2005 (see Pfeifer 2009, Appendix B). Fifty-one of the 169 titles fell into the general category “economic development, backwardness, and reform,” while thirty-one treated issues of demography and human resources, twenty-seven dealt with politics or international relations, and eighteen dealt with economic history and geography. The interdisciplinary subjects accounted for 127 out of 169 titles, or 75 percent. Economics more narrowly defined accounted for just 13 percent, including Islamic economics, international trade, energy, and banking and finance.
  10. The first three volumes were published by JAI Press, the other three by Elsevier.
  11. For example, the current president and a past president of MEEA, both professors at universities in the United States, were “elected by Economic Research Forum’s (ERF) research fellows as new members of the Board of Directors of ERF for a five-year term starting in 2012” (MEEA 2012, 6).
  12. The World Bank Group is made up of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Development Association, the International Finance Corporation, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (see IMF 2013 for listing of IMF-led groups and “clubs”). Both the World Bank and the IMF have relationships with regional institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the African Development Bank, and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development.
  13. Persons with regional names made up 77 percent of new members in the 2001–6 period, and people working in the region constituted 46 percent (see Pfeifer 2009, Table 3).
  14. In 2006, the committee included four members working in institutions in the region and four in international organizations and academies, one of whom was also president of MEEA at that time (Pfeifer 2009, Table 2).
  15. The website also specifies, “Membership in this category is not open for Application.”
  16. Because of political uncertainty, MEEA’s conference in Alexandria, Egypt, was postponed from 2011 to 2012, and the 2011 international conference was moved to Barcelona and sponsored with another organization.
  17. For more information, see their website at [www.fsm2013.org/en](http://www.fsm2013.org/en).

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18. In 2003, Lyn Squire was working at the World Bank as chief economist of the MENA vice presidency, as director of the research department, and as director of the 1990 *World Development Report on Poverty*. As of November 2013, he was an ERF senior associate and managing editor of *MEDJ*. View his profile at [www.erf.org.eg/cms.php?id=erf\\_affiliates\\_senior\\_associates\\_details&affiliates\\_id=71](http://www.erf.org.eg/cms.php?id=erf_affiliates_senior_associates_details&affiliates_id=71) (accessed May 30, 2014).
  19. Ali Abdel Gadir Ali was a senior associate of ERF in 2013; see his profile at [www.erf.org.eg/cms.php?id=erf\\_affiliates\\_senior\\_associates\\_details&affiliates\\_id=24](http://www.erf.org.eg/cms.php?id=erf_affiliates_senior_associates_details&affiliates_id=24) (accessed May 30, 2014).
  20. I can supply a list of examples of this literature upon request. The gist of IFIs' patronizing approach is captured in the 2012 speech by the IMF director David Lipton, "Enabling Economic Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa," at the London School of Economics; the text of the speech is available at [www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2012/111312.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2012/111312.htm) (accessed July 17, 2015).