



SEPAD

Sectarianism, Proxies &
De-sectarianisation



Social Theory in the Middle East
Simon Mabon & Edward Wastnidge (eds)

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Introduction

In the decade after the Arab Uprisings, the Middle East has been characterized by a series of (often competing) struggles to shape political life. Amidst the fragmentation of regime-society relations and attempts by rulers to retain power, people have struggled to meet their basic needs. The fragmentation of the sovereign state has presented a number of existential challenges to regional order and, in the struggle to ensure regime survival amidst internal and external threats, the people of the region have paid the heaviest price. The struggle for basic needs has resulted in people turning away from the state – when it has failed to provide – and toward other identities that are better placed to protect them. Tribal, religious and ethnic loyalties have become increasingly important within this context, as people struggle to meet their basic needs, but as regimes also struggle to maintain their power. Amidst these changing pressures and the transformation of power from the core to the periphery, the need to engage with the changing geopolitical environment is paramount.

Across a turbulent decade, questions about the nature of political organisation and the regulation of life have prompted scholars to seek answers from a range of different sources. In recent years, a growing number of scholars working in and on the Middle East have used social theories as a means to understand political, social, economic, cultural and religious developments across the region. Thinkers ranging from Frantz Fanon to Hannah Arendt, Pierre Bourdieu to Ibn Khaldun have offered prescient insight into the rhythms ordering life within and across the region. These rhythms differ dramatically as a consequence of the contingencies and complexities of local context.

Social theory has become increasingly attractive due to its ability to reflect on both structure and agency in political machinations, social concerns and everyday life. Indeed, social theory provides tools to critically reflect on the interplay between state and society, self and society, self and state, identity and state, and much more. This burgeoning interest has prompted analysis of a range of different cases, including but not limited to states, urban environments, gender, space, law, populism, democracy and violence.

This collection of essays by leading scholars on the contemporary Middle East reflects on the ways in which social theory can help us understand the region. Each essay provides an overview of a key social theorist, offering insight into the theorist's main ideas, ways to apply them, challenges, and a short bibliography.

Such an endeavour will undeniably contain omissions; contrasting efforts could have included Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Mahmoud Mamdani or other thinkers. There is also, perhaps, an over reliance on Western, male thinkers. It is important to acknowledge this, although this perhaps points to a broader structural issue with knowledge production and the Middle East. That being said, we are confident that this collection offers important comparative insight into the ways in which social theory can help us interrogate the rhythms of everyday life across the Middle East.

In pursuit of this, each essay is structured in a broadly similar way, beginning with a broader contextual discussion of the intellectual environment before providing an overview the theoretical components. Essays then consider the ways in which such approaches can be applied and flag up key issues to consider moving forwards.

Giorgio Agamben

Simon Mabon

In the summer of 2013, I sat in the home of a man who in the years that followed would become a close friend. The man, a former Member of Parliament in Bahrain, welcomed me into his home during Ramadan to discuss the events of the Arab Uprisings. At the time of our conversation, however, the man was not a citizen of Bahrain, having had his citizenship revoked by the ruling Al Khalifa family. In doing so, he became stateless, devoid of legal rights or protection and his life stripped of the political meaning that had been his cause for so long. The Al Khalifa's decision to strip him of his citizenship – along with countless others (SALAM, 2021) - was the action of a sovereign using all manner of technologies of control in support of regime survival (Mabon, 2020).

The concept of sovereignty has provoked a vast set of literatures seeking to better understand the roots, manifestation, performance, evolution, and contestation of sovereign power. Often intimately tied to ideas of statehood, sovereignty, for the Italian Philosopher Giorgio Agamben (b1942), is much more concerned with power and the capacity of the sovereign to order life. Emerging from a nine-volume canon, Agamben's ideas offer a rich reflection on the inner workings of sovereign power and its relationship to people living in the state.

Located at the intersection of Philosophy and Philology – and social theory by virtue of its application – Agamben's work on sovereign power is influenced by Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger and Aristotle, bringing together a disparate collection of thinkers in pursuit of a project existing at the heart of modernity and the nature of the political.

A Theory of Sovereign Power

Deconstructing Agamben's approach to sovereign power reveals the interplay between a number of concepts, notably the state of exception, bare life, and the camp. Central to much of this is the concept of the state of exception. Here, Agamben departs from the ideas of Carl Schmitt – whose famous claim “sovereign is he who decides on the exception” opens *Political Theology* – arguing that the exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other. The suspension of the norm does not mean its abolition, and the zone of anomie that it establishes is not (or at least claims not to be) unrelated to the juridical order (Agamben, 2005)

For Agamben, “the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule” (Agamben, 1995). From this, the state of exception is “the preliminary condition for any definition of the relation that binds and at the same time abandons the living being to the law”, creating conditions in which the law is able to survive its suspension in the form of the force of law. The state of exception is a space devoid of law, brought about through the deactivation of legal norms, existing as “the preliminary condition for any definition of the relation that binds and at the same time abandons the living being to the law”

(Agamben, 2005). The state of exception exists as the legal form of that which cannot have legal form, a paradox and zone of indistinction. Agamben argues that the state of exception is “the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics” (ibid) and, following Walter Benjamin, is now the norm.

In such conditions, whereby the state has the right to abandon the living being to law – an illegal but juridical and constitutional move (ibid) - political life and meaning can be stripped from individuals (at the whim of the sovereign), reducing them to bare life, or the figure of *homo sacer*. In making such an observation Agamben draws on the Aristotelean distinction between the *good life* (the legal status of a human being, as Thomas Lemke suggests), and the natural existence (Lemke, 2005) The creation of bare life is a common feature of contemporary politics, positioned centrally due to its position at the vanguard of political life, “that whose exclusions found the city of men” (Agamben, 2005). As Agamben observes, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoe*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested (ibid).

Such moves, conditioned by the declaration of a state of exception, are made possible by the idea of a ban, inscribing exclusion through inclusion (Gregory, 2004). With the normalisation of the exception – becoming a central feature of contemporary political life – abandonment and bare life have the capacity to render all as virtually *homines sacri*. Such a view emerges from “a biopolitics that technologizes, administers, and depoliticizes and thereby renders the political and power relations irrelevant” (Edkins, Pin-Fat, 2004). And from this, bare life moves to dwell “in the biological body of every living being”, leaving them at the discretion of sovereign power (Agamben, 1995).

As geographers such as Claudio Minca, Rory Rowan, Sara Fregonese and others will attest, Agamben’s work has a strong spatial current running through it, with some viewing Agamben’s work as an attempt to map “socio-geographical phenomena within which the exception operates (Belcher, *et al*, 2008). For Agamben, the camp “*is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule*” (Agamben, 1995) (emphasis in original). Those in the camp reside in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer make any sense” (ibid).

In such spaces, the sovereign possesses a “natural right to do anything to anyone” (Agamben, 2005). The centrality of the camp in Agamben’s account is perhaps best seen in his observation that insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation. This is why the camp is the very paradigm of political space at the point at which politics becomes biopolitics and *homo sacer* is virtually confused with the citizen (Agamben, 1995).

Although highly theoretical, Agamben’s ideas offer valuable insight to better understand the nature of political life across the Middle East.

Agamben in Application

In particular, Agamben's ideas provide rich theoretical insight into the ways in which life is regulated across the Middle East. The focus on the inner workings of sovereign power offers valuable tools to better understand the use of the law as a mechanism of control – seen in the widespread deployment of emergency laws, for example - or the implications of sovereign power on people across the region (Mabon, 2020) Beyond this, scholars have applied Agamben's ideas to interrogate the ways in which power operates, focussing on refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, emergency laws in Egypt, urbicide, statelessness, sexuality, resistance, and much more (Hanfi, Long, 2010; Ramadan, 2010; Ramadan, 2009; Ramadan, Fregonese, 2017; Lentin, 2018; Lentin 2008) Fundamentally, the forensic focus on the operation of sovereign power can then be used in a range of different ways to critically reflect on the inner workings of power and relations between rulers and ruled.

Critics of Agamben bemoan his engagement with agency, with many suggesting that his account offers little scope for agency. Once an individual is abandoned into bare life, the argument goes, there is no scope for resistance. Yet as scholars such as Patricia Owens argue, even the refugee has the capacity to express political agency (Owens, 2009).

One way in which Agamben has sought to counter this is through the concept of destituent power, the thought that sovereign power can be turned against itself in pursuit of deactivation. For Agamben, destituent power is “a force that, in its very constitution, deactivates the governmental machine” (Agamben, 2014). Moreover, it is “the capacity to deactivate something and render it inoperative - a power, a function, a human operation - without simply destroying it but by liberating the potentials that have remained inactive in it in order to allow a different use of them”(Agamben, 2016). In making the thing inoperable, actors seek to engender dysfunctionality, aiming at inoperability. As The Invisible Committee observes, acts of destituent power against the sovereign machine “neutralises it, empties it of substance [and] takes a step aside and watches the institution expire”(Gavroche, 2017). In practical terms, for example, in Lebanon this involves activists exposing loopholes, ambiguities and contradictions to render legal processes aimed at LGBTQ+ groups inoperative (Nagle, 2020). Or, in the case of Palestine, protesters playing chess in streets, changing the meaning of urban environments so that the Israeli state was unable to evict Palestinian East Jerusalemites (Ruished, 2021)

The application of Agamben's ideas in the Middle East – beyond the Judaeo-Christian, Western philosophical and political tradition in which they were forged – warrants attention. Indeed, Agamben's ideas are driven by questions about the ordering of life conditioned by modernity, which shapes his understanding of state-society relations and the emergence and performance of sovereign power broadly. Here, as broad decolonisation moves have demonstrated, questions emerge about the universal applications of ideas forged in the West. Yet as thinkers such as Wael Hallaq stress, there are broader factors that allow us to talk about states across the world. For Hallaq, states must possess five form-properties in order to be recognised as a state: a constitution as historical experience; sovereignty and ensuing metaphysics; a legislative monopoly; a bureaucratic machinery; and a cultural hegemonic engagement with the social order (Hallaq, 2012) Accepting this allows us to talk of states – and sovereignty – across spatial and temporal contexts, providing an entrance point to engage with Agamben's ideas in the Muslim world. This entrance point then allows for an intellectual

interrogation of sovereignty and metaphysical difference, the nature of cultural hegemonic engagement, social order, and state-society relations¹.

Conclusions

Whilst undeniably complex, there is much to be gained from applying Agamben's ideas to the Middle East, with the focus on sovereign power shedding light on the complexities of life across a range of different contexts. Amidst ongoing political crises emanating from fractious relations between rulers and ruled, Agamben's work offers valuable insight in better understanding the nature of political power and the way in which life is regulated.

Key Texts

Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995)

Agamben, Giorgio, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

Agamben, Giorgio, 'What is a Destituent Power?' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32:1 (2014)

Agamben, Giorgio, *The Use of Bodies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016)

Useful secondary literature on the topic includes:

Mabon, Simon., Alsarghali, Sana., Ruished, Adel, *States of Exception or Exceptional States: Law, Politics and Giorgio Agamben in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2022)

Svirsky, Marcelo., Bignall, Simone, *Agamben and Colonialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012)

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Belcher, Oliver., Martin, Lauren., Secor, Anna., Simon, Stephanie., Wilson, Tommy, 'Everywhere and Nowhere: The Exception and the Topological Challenge to Geography', *Antipode* 40 (2008)

Edkins, Jenni., Pin-Fat, Veronika, 'Introduction: Life, power, resistance', in Jenny Edkins, Michael J. Shapiro and Veronika Pin-Fat, *Sovereign Lives: Power in Global Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2004)

¹ The work of other thinkers in this collection offers rich insight into some of these issues, perhaps most notably Pierre Bourdieu.

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- Mabon, Simon, “Houses built on sand: Violence, sectarianism and revolution in the Middle East”, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020)
- Nagle, Veronika, ‘Consociationalism is Dead! Long Live Zombie Power-Sharing’, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 20:2 (2020)
- Owens, Patricia, ‘Reclaiming ‘Bare Life’?: Against Agamben on Refugees’, *International Relations* 23:4 (2009)
- Ramadan, Adam, ‘Destroying Nahr el-Bared: Sovereignty and urbicide in the space of exception’, *Political Geography* 28:3 (2009)
- Ramadan, Adam., Fregonese, Sara ‘Hybrid Sovereignty and the State of Exception in the Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon’, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 107:4 (2017)
- Ramadan, Adam, ‘In the Ruins of Nahr al-Barid: Understanding the meaning of the camp’, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40:1 (2010)
- Ruished, Adel, *Jerusalem: eyewitness account from a divided city* (The Conversation, 28.05.21) <https://theconversation.com/jerusalem-eyewitness-account-from-a-divided-city-161290>
- SALAM DHR "Arbitrary Revocation of Nationality - A Tool Of Oppression". (SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights; Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion; The MENA Statelessness Network. 2021) <https://salam-dhr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Arbitrary-Revocation-of-Nationality-in-Bahrain-final-3.pdf>.

Ali Shariati

Edward Wastnidge

Ali Shariati is often cited as one of the key ‘ideologues’ behind Iran’s revolution, despite not living to see its success in overthrowing the Shah in 1979. The social and political thought of Shariati was highly influential amongst segments of the opposition to the Shah in the decade leading up to the revolution. His ability to take elements of 20th Century postcolonial political thought and imbibe it with Iranian and religious meaning, and reference points, gave him a popular appeal that still resonates in some sections of Iranian political thought and debate today. While much work has understandably focused on the relevance of Shariati’s political thought for both Iran’s revolutionary experience and political life in the Islamic Republic, its application beyond these milieus is less well covered. The following starts by offering an overview of the intellectual context and key arguments of Shariati’s wide ranging work, which has been well-explored elsewhere². It then looks at Shariati’s thought in application, before finishing with some of the issues to be aware of when applying his work.

Intellectual context

Shariati’s intellectual development drew on his upbringing in a politically active, religious family which shaped his engagement with pro-Mossadegh, anti-Shah movements during the politically contested 1950s in Iran. His affiliation with modernising Islamic revival movements such as the Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths (led by his father), and the Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists helped to establish a religiously grounded vision of social justice which shaped his life’s work.

Shariati was also heavily influenced by the time he spent in Paris during the early 1960s, where he completed his doctorate in Sociology. During this period, he came under the influence of the French orientalist Louis Massignon, who helped further shape Shariati’s interest in Gnosticism and the development an ‘Abrahamic view’ of all religions transcending sects and difference (Rahnema, 2014). From this experience, Shariati began to develop his conception of a socio-political mission for all Abrahamic faiths in terms of helping the poor and oppressed of society by eradicating class differences and supporting the meek. Shariati was also influenced by the existentialist thinking of John-Paul Sartre, a contemporary of his in Paris, and the work of Frantz Fanon, part of whose work he translated into Persian (Abrahamian, 1982)³. As the pre-eminent biographer (in English) of Shariati, Ali Rahnema, notes, Fanon reinforced Shariati’s beliefs that colonised peoples in the 3rd world could only succeed by returning to themselves and their own history (Rahnema, 2014).

Though his doctoral training in the West exposed him to a number of contemporary political currents and philosophies, many of which were Marxist-oriented in keeping with the times, Shariati developed

² For a list of key readings, both by Shariati and scholars of his work, please see the ‘suggested readings’ at the end of this piece.

³ Abrahamian also notes how Shariati had correspondence with Fanon during this period, challenging him on his position regarding religion and revolution.

his social and political thought primarily with the context of Iran and Islam in mind. To this end, his work built on that of thinkers such as Jamal al-Din al Afghani, and in particular the notion of *gharbzadegi* (or ‘westoxification’) popularised by his contemporary Jalal Al-e Ahmad, whom he viewed as a pioneer of anti-imperialist political thought alongside Fanon. Shariati was an admirer of Mohammad Iqbal, who had also completed his doctorate in Europe and engaged with key European philosophers of his time, describing him in one essay as a ‘reformer of Islamic society’ (Shariati, 2014). Indeed, as Saffari highlights, his readings of thinkers such as al Afghani and Iqbal emphasised what he saw as their open and synthetic nature (Saffari, 2017).

Though Iran was never formally colonised by Western imperial powers, Shariati can be considered as a postcolonial thinker who Sadeghi-Boroujerdi argues was able to meld his idiosyncratic, modernist interpretation of Shi’ism with the Third Worldist, anti-Imperialist zeitgeist of the 1960s and 1970s (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 2017). Shariati’s relationship with Marxism is worthy of note here. Though he is often cited as having leftist leanings on account of the egalitarianism of his message and the time in which he was active, he was also a staunch critic of Marxist political thought and clashed with the revolutionary left in Iran. This became more prominent in his later writings and in the context of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*’s conversion to Marxist-Leninism in the early 1970s. For Shariati, Marxism and Islam were contradictory forces, and a such were rivals in the fight against imperialism (Rahnema, 2014).

Regular attempts by the Shah’s regime to censure his work culminated in imprisonment from 1973-1975, and Shariati died shortly after going into exile in 1977. As opposition grew against the Shah, Shariati’s work became increasingly popular. Though a member of the intelligentsia, his ability to speak in accessible language, using religious and cultural reference points that were familiar to people from all walks of society, gave his social and political thought a wide-ranging appeal. Some of his most well-known lectures came from his time working with the Hosseiniyeh Ershad in Tehran, a hot bed of religious debate and opposition to the Shah from 1968 onwards.

Key arguments

During the course of his life, Shariati produced a multitude of works⁴, ranging from subjects as diverse as existentialist philosophy, the role of women in society, political thinkers, ideologies, key figures in the history of Islam, the role of the clergy, and many more topics. This breadth and prolificacy means that a key argument can be hard to pin down, but there are recurring themes across many of his works. For Shariati, the increasingly despotic rule and Westernising tendencies of the Shah were best combated through a ‘return to the self’, where Islam could be used to fully understand Iran’s history. His eclectic approach allowed him to fuse modernity and religion as a means of solving the problems Iran was facing as a society. Rahnema describes Shariati as a ‘natural dialectician’, with binary elements underpinning much of his philosophical discourse (Rahnema, 2014). It allowed him to advance what Saffari frames as a ‘socio-politically progressive discourse of indigenous modernity

⁴ There is no exhaustive ‘complete works’ of Shariati in English, and his full written works remain untranslated. Much of his well-known work for English audiences has come through secondary treatments of his works based on the original Persian sources, and also in the transcribed lectures that were given during his time at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad during the 1970s. A sample of his written work and transcribed lectures are available online at: <http://www.shariati.com/kotob.html>. A wider selection can be found on the Persian language version of the site, and includes recordings of his speeches.

that engages freely and creatively with a wide range of emancipatory projects in the modern world' (Saffari, 2017). Shariati also helped revive the Quranic term '*mostazafin*' (the 'oppressed'), used in his translation of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (translated as *mostazafin-e zaman*). Shariati's discourse of the *mostazafin* has been compared to the liberation theology of Latin America that became popular during Shariati's era due to its emancipatory potential (Saffari, 2017). It was a term that went on to be utilised by Khomeini and which played a key role in the narrative of the Iranian revolution in 1979 and in the founding principles of the Islamic Republic.

There was a progressive intent behind much of Shariati's work, and as a pluralist thinker he utilised the more progressive elements of Western political thought that he had engaged with in Paris as something of a mirror image of what he described as 'authentic Islam' (Rahnema, 2014), citing the religion's inherently democratic and emancipatory characteristics. He espoused a monotheistic worldview repurposing the concept of *towhid* (unity or 'oneness' of God) to encompass the whole of humanity and existence. Shariati often used notable figures and episodes from the history of Islam to emphasise these features, emphasising the revolutionary aspects of the death of Hussein and the historical experience of the Shia. For example, he was a great admirer of Abu Zarr⁵, a revered figure in Shi'ism who he saw as initiating the struggle for Islamic equality and for whom Islam was a refuge of the helpless and the oppressed (Shariati, 2017). Another famous piece tells the story of the Prophet's daughter and wife of Ali, Fatima, who is held up by Shariati as a source of inspiration among the deprived masses who are resisting oppression (Shariati, 1980). Shariati used such episodes from Shi'i and broader Islamic history, along with pointed allegories, to rally against capitalist elites and their tastes, implicitly contrasting the opulence of the Shah's regime with the lives of small merchants and villagers (ibid). In '*Islamshenasi*' (Islamology), Shariati sought to present a 'modern' egalitarian and democratic Islam, emphasising concepts such as *shura* (consultation) and '*ijma* (consensus), thus enabling a politicised reinterpretation and definition of classical Islamic concepts (Rahnema, 2014).

Although he was fully cognisant of social science methodologies, Shariati saw in their quest for objectivity an inherent lack of social responsibility. This did not sit well with his firm and revolutionary belief in the need for intellectuals and, importantly, theologians, to articulate their views and judgements to the people. If Shariati's Islamic faith acted as the foundation of his political thought, the clerics who had for centuries acted as guardians of that faith were a repeated target of his writings and lectures. In *Fatima is Fatima*, Shariati scolds the ulema for not sufficiently teaching followers about the words and deeds of the prophet's family (Shariati, 1980). His essay *Red Shi'ism: The Religion of Martyrdom. Black Shi'ism: The Religion of Mourning* has been described by Sadeghi-Boroujerdi as his 'most celebrated attempt to turn Shi'i Islam into an ideology of revolutionary agency' (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 2017). In this series of speeches Shariati distinguished between the true Shi'ism of Ali (or red Shi'ism of martyrdom), and that which was established by the Safavid dynasty (the black Shi'ism of mourning). For Shariati, Alavi or red Shi'ism had a deeply held revolutionary mission aimed at leading the deprived and oppressed masses towards freedom and for the seeking of justice (Shariati, 1980), whereas Safavid Shi'ism was a reactionary force representative of the ruling classes, traditionalist ulema, and defenders of the political and religious status quo.

⁵ One of Shariati's earliest publications was a translation of the work *Abu Zarr: The God-Worshipping Socialist*, by the Egyptian novelist Abd al-Hamid Jawdat al-Sahar.

In practical terms Shariati's work found its chief targets in his challenging of monarchical rule in Iran and the perceived dogmatism of traditionalist clerics. His contribution goes beyond the Iranian case though by seeking to present a response to the encounters between Western-defined 'modernity' and Islam, and through emancipating the oppressed in the face of corrupted elites.

In application

Perhaps the most obvious starting points for the 'application' of Shariati's political thought can be found in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The unleashing of the revolutionary potential of Shi'ism certainly found a platform among a cross section of the political movements that coalesced to bring down the monarchy in Iran. Though Shariati's death in 1977 preceded the revolution, the revolutionary (re)interpretation of Islam he espoused naturally has important corollaries for understanding its eventual outcomes. Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, scholars sought to trace the ideological foundations of this new, revolutionary interpretation of Islam, seeking to highlight the breadth and sophistication of the political thought of intellectuals that underpinned it, such as Shariati⁶. Shariati's emphasis on a form of guided democracy, in keeping with the anti-colonial leaders of the time, has a natural affinity with Khomeini's conception of Islamic government which went on to shape the political institutionalisation of the Islamic Republic.

The post-revolutionary readings of Shariati's works are particularly important 'testing grounds' for the continued applicability of his political thought, and his ideas maintain their currency in Iran today. His ideas remain important both in their perceived contribution to the revolutionary project of the Islamic Republic but also in questioning some of its more contentious outcomes. Saffari in particular has discussed how a subsequent generation of 'neo-Shariatis' use insight from his work to address a multitude of questions relevant to political and social life in the Islamic Republic (Saffari, 2017). For Saffari, the neo-Shariatis, which for him include some of the so-called 'religious intellectuals' such as Hassan Yousef Eshkevari, provide important critiques to some of the more nativist and culturally-essentialist discourses espoused by traditionalists and Islamists in the Islamic Republic (ibid). Instead, they '...emphasise the hybridity of cultural identity and the historical and philosophical unsustainability of identarian claims.' (ibid) This allows an emphasis on multiple strands to critique elements of autocratic rule more broadly, which some neo-Shariatis have undertaken in relation to clerical rule in Iran.

Beyond its obvious applicability to social and political developments in post-revolutionary Iran, the pluralist nature of Shariati's thought is also relevant to contemporary debates around sectarianism in the broader Middle Eastern context. Despite his regular use of often explicitly Shi'i concepts and historical analogies, Shariati's discourse often emphasises the heterogeneity of Islam (Rahnema, 2014), and it is one that arguably transcends sectarian divides, seeking to highlight progressive thought in both Sunni and Shi'i Islam. A more identarian-focused application can also be used to explore the use of certain identity markers by Iran in elements of its foreign policy. For example, support for the *mostazafin* beyond Iran remains embedded in its foreign policy, sitting as it does within the very constitution of the Islamic Republic. If one were to extrapolate to the Resistance Axis, the varying hues of '3rd world-ism' present at varying times in the Islamic Republic's foreign policy, or indeed the official response to the Arab Uprisings as an 'Islamic Awakening', then this

⁶ See, for example, Abrahamian, *Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution*; and Hamd Algar, *Roots of the Islamic Revolution* (Open Press, 1983)

more ideological lineage is clear. As ever, reducing Iran's foreign policy to just one aspect of its multi-faceted identities and interests is a major over-simplification, but it shows how such political ideas can have a practical manifestation.

In addition to the Iranian case, Shariati's work can also be useful in helping us understand the role, or indeed lack thereof, of ideologies in contemporary events such as the Arab Uprisings. For example, in comparing the events of the late 1970s in Iran with the uprisings, Asef Bayat notes how the absence of radical strategies and revolutionary ideas ultimately led to the stymieing of the latter (Bayat, 2017). Re-readings of Shariati's work in the light of developments in contemporary, populist-Islamist politics in Turkey, and in the success or otherwise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, can also provide innovative theoretical insight to understanding the continuing salience of religious identities in political mobilisation.

One can also make a strong case for including Shariati among the panoply of postcolonial thinkers who continue to challenge the epistemological and ontological foundations of still Western-centric disciplines such as International Relations. Though Iran was never formerly colonised, Shariati's writings had much in common with other postcolonial writers. His emphasis on the hegemony of Western political ideas and civilisation, encounters with 'modernity', and strong anti-Imperialist bent, can be aligned with much of the work that postcolonial theorists undertake in seeking to challenge many of the deeply held assumptions about relations between states, peoples and cultures. There are certainly some interesting parallels that can be drawn with Shariati's work and those of postcolonial IR scholars, such as Robbie Shilliam, who seek to problematise the 'geo-cultural division of knowledge production' (Shilliam, 2011), and scholars who attempt to emphasise postcolonial agency in constructing and/or re-constituting the international (Bilgin 2016; Jabri, 2014). Shariati's work also continues to be applied by scholars exploring his contribution to a wide range of questions in social and political thought more broadly⁷.

Issues to be aware of

Though this essay has made a claim for the continued relevance of Shariati's political thought in a number of theoretical, temporal, and disciplinary milieus, one should be cautious in overstating his impact, or extrapolating selected elements of his wide-ranging oeuvre to current debates. Labelling Shariati as one of the chief 'ideologues' of Iran's revolution does not do his broader work full justice, and we will never know what he might have thought of the revolution's outcomes, nor whether he would have had a role as an active political thinker in the Islamic Republic. Notable contemporaries and former students of Shariati's are aligned with the Freedom Movement and have been censured regularly for their opposition to certain political and social developments in the Islamic Republic. Care also needs to be taken when drawing direct lineage or application of his ideas in the Iranian context, due to the often selective appropriation of his ideas, particularly by reformist intellectuals, as discussed extensively by Sadeghi-Borujerdi (2017). Contemporary Iranian thinkers such as Abdolkarim Soroush and Daryush Shayegan have also offered important critiques of Shariati's ideologisation of Islam and perceived reductionism⁸.

⁷ See for example the edited volume by Dustin J. Byrd and Seyed Javid Miri, *Ali Shariati and the Future of Social Theory: Religion, Revolution, and the Role of the Intellectual* (Leiden: Brill, 2018)

⁸ See, for example Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam & Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), pp. 194-199; Shayegan

Finally, while Shariati's work was of course often written with reference to the Iranian context, and within which it has found its most fertile application to date, there is scope to take his work further. The very nature of academic knowledge production has privileged Western voices in social and political thought. It is these figures, and related theoretical paradigms, whose work is so often applied to the Middle East. The under-representation of voices and perspectives from the region is evidenced by the very roll call of theorists discussed in the compilation of reports in which this essay sits. Therefore, a corrective is much needed to help deprivilege the dominant role that Western theorisations have played when seeking to 'understand' the region from without.

Suggested Reading

In terms of English language collections of Shariati's most famous works:

Ali Shariati, *The Collected works of Dr Ali Shariati* (Mustbe Interactive, 2014)

- English-language website of Ali Shariati, contains partial translations of his work: <http://www.shariati.com/kotob.html>
- A more extensive compilation of his writings can be found in the Persian language version of the website: <http://www.shariati.com/gallery.html> , with recordings of his speeches here: <http://www.shariati.com/speech.html>

Key secondary analyses of Shariati's work:

Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: a political biography of Ali Shariati* (London: IB Tauris, 2014)
Siavash Saffari, *Beyond Shariati: modernity, cosmopolitanism and Islam in Iranian political thought* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2017)

Understanding Shariati's influence in terms of wider developments related to Iran's revolution and its political development:

Ervand Abrahamian, 'Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution', *MERIP Reports*, no. 102, (1982) Available online at <https://merip.org/1982/01/ali-shariati-ideologue-of-the-iranian-revolution/>

Shahrough Akhavi, 'Islam, politics and society in the thought of Ayatullah Khomeini, Ayatullah Taliqani and Ali Shariati', *Middle Eastern Studies* 24 (4) (1988): 404-431

Hamd Algar, *Roots of the Islamic Revolution* (Open Press, 1983)

Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam & Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008)

Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform*(London: I.B. Tauris, 2008)

described Shariati's thought as '...a mixture of two paradigms vomiting one another out' - see Daryush Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (London: Saqi Books, 1992), p. 55.

- Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, *Revolution and its Discontents: political thought and reform in Iran* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2019)
- Siavash Saffari, 'Two Pro- Mostazafin Discourses in the 1979 Iranian Revolution', *Contemporary Islam*, (2017) 11: 287 – 301

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- Bayat, Asef, *Revolution without revolutionaries: Making sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017)
- Bilgin, Pinar, 'How to remedy Eurocentrism in IR? A complement and a challenge for The Global Transformation', *International Theory*, (2016): 8 (3) pp. 492–501
- Jabri, Vivienne, 'Disarming norms: postcolonial agency and the constitution of the international', *International Theory*, (2014), 6(2) pp. 372-390.
- Rahnema, Ali, *An Islamic Utopian: a political biography of Ali Shariati* (London: IB Tauris, 2014), p.120-123.
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- Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, Eskandar, *Revolution and its Discontents: political thought and reform in Iran* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2019), p. 116.
- Shariati, Ali, 'Mohammed Iqbal', *The Collected works of Dr Ali Shariati* (Mustbe Interactive, 2014), p.604.
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- Shilliam, Robbie, 'The perilous but unavoidable terrain of the non-West', in Shilliam, R.(ed.) *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2011)

Edward Saïd

Rubal Ali Al-Hassani

In order to wage our struggle [“against the whole system of confinement, dispossession, exploitation and oppression that still holds us down”], we must first feel our chains, then we must understand them, then we must break them. And we must not allow ourselves to be bound again, least of all by chains of our own making (E. Saïd, 1977)125-6, 129-30, [emphasis added]).

As one of the most influential thinkers on anti-colonialism, Edward Saïd is the kind of intellectual who not only challenges a dominating system of knowledge, but also leaves his readers in existential reflection, inviting them to contemplate not only how Orientalizing systems affect them, but also their personal positionality in their research. As one of the first anti- and post-colonialist theorists, Saïd remains as relevant as ever during today’s decolonization movements.

Intellectual Context

Arguably one of the most influential thinkers in the humanities and known mostly for his works, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward William Wadie Saïd was born on 01 November 1935 in Jerusalem and spent his childhood between the two then-British colonies of Palestine and Egypt. His schooling, whether in Jerusalem or Cairo, was in Western-styled institutions. At the age of 15, his parents sent him to the United States to continue his education in Massachusetts. He went on to graduate from Princeton and Harvard, then taught English & Comparative Literature. Despite an apolitical youth, Saïd expressed later in life that he did not feel like he belonged anywhere particular. He longed for Palestine and took up its cause during his adulthood, especially as the 1967 war triggered his explorations of exile and dislocation. Geographically and socially, he was out of place, as he titled his autobiography. His early years determined the course of his career, as his scholarship reveals a personal dimension which he found crucial to integrate. This was important to him as an interdisciplinary scholar, which he effectively was, for he was heavily influenced not only by novelists and playwrights like Joseph Conrad (who was the subject of Saïd’s doctoral dissertation and first book) and Jean-Paul Sartre, but also by the works of sociologists like Michel Foucault and Theodor Adorno, psychiatrists and anti-colonialists like Fanon, and political philosophers like Antonio Gramsci.

In *Orientalism* (1978), Saïd outlines three aspects of his ‘contemporary reality’ that shaped the course of his research and writing, one of which was the *personal dimension*. This was inspired by Gramsci, who had written on the importance self-consciousness and compiling an ‘inventory’ of personal history as the starting point of critical elaboration. Saïd’s study of Orientalism was a personal investment derived from his awareness of being an ‘Oriental’; an attempt to ‘inventory the traces’ (*Ibid*, 40). He explains this as the reason for centering the Islamic Orient in his work.

The second aspect of his contemporary reality was the *methodological question*—‘that there is no such thing as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to *enable* what follows from them’ (*Ibid*). Labelle (2022) argues that Saïd’s decolonial beginnings stretched as far back as his 1968 essay ‘The Arab Portrayed’ where he critiqued

the media's portrayal of Arabs, then with his second book *Beginnings* in 1975, and in a 1977 essay on eliminating all forms of discrimination. The third aspect of Saïd's contemporary reality, which he had listed as the first, was the distinction between pure and political knowledge—'the latter where ideology is woven directly into written material' (Saïd, 1978, 40). His argument here is that each humanistic investigation must be contextualized historically and socially. He argued that historical power structures—namely colonial ones—not only influence, but determine, the shape of knowledge around various subjects. It is here that he borrowed from the works of Michel Foucault and Frantz Fanon—both of whom are cited widely in his work.

Key Argument

Saïd's *Orientalism* (1978) remains widely recognized as one of the most influential texts in the humanities, and one that launched a rightfully penetrating attack on the West's imagination of the Orient and its construction in the text and media. As a literary critic, he believed in the power of words and storytelling, and identified a power structure visible in Western literary classics which portray an imagination of the Orient. He coined the term *Orientalism* to describe a system of thought that forges minds; a field of learned study; and an outcome of a process—*Orientalizing*—that is an exercise of cultural strength. This is where his inspiration from Foucault's work on power and knowledge merges with Fanon's work on the psychological effects of colonial subjugation. Saïd described Orientalism as a '*distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts*' (*Ibid*, 36) which has a '*cumulative and corporate identity*' [emphasis added], one that is particularly strong given its associations with traditional learning, public institutions, and 'generically determined writing' (*Ibid*, 222). The result here is a consensus of sorts: an accepted truth about the Orient from the eyes of the 'superior' in a power hierarchy. In this *Orientalizing* process, there is a "certain *will or intention*" (*Ibid*, 36) to understand, control, manipulate, and incorporate, a world deemed manifestly different and lesser. Orientalism is not simply about misrepresenting the Orient as a demonized and dehumanized 'other'; it has less to do with the Orient itself and more to do with the West—the perceived centre of the world.

Orientalism therefore is a set of constraints upon, and limitations of, thought where the distinction between Occidental superiority and Oriental inferiority is ineradicable. Nevertheless, Saïd instead chose to believe 'in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise collective anonymous body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism' (*Ibid*, 23). While Saïd did not offer alternatives to Orientalism in the book and was criticized for not doing so (Owen, 2012), he explored them in other works. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he adapted a musical term for literary criticism, arguing that literary works should be considered *contrapuntally* (Saïd et al., 2000, xxix). By contrapuntal criticism, Saïd meant that European culture must be read 'in relation to its geographic and spatial relations to empire as well as in counterpoint to the works the colonized themselves produced in response to colonial domination' (*Ibid*). He did not believe that models for harmonious world order were ready at hand (Saïd, 1993, 21), but he believed in 'continued operation in a spirit of opposition', rather than in accommodation, dissenting against the status quo.

This need for dissent contributes to the existential tone which Saïd's work carries. He openly questioned the place of literary critics like himself in society. Conrad's and Fanon's existentialism triggered Saïd's, and Saïd's existentialism triggered my own as I worked on this report. According to Saïd, it was 'the openness of the conscious mind that critic and writer meet to engage in the act of knowing and being aware of an experience' (Labelle, 2022, 607). Saïd deduced that 'questions of

human existence had to grapple with one's positionality in humanity at large—that is, one's relationships with both others and otherness within a worldly structure' (*Ibid*). Engaging in this self-reflection, Saïd also wrote about intellectualism in exile, which was personal to him as both strangely compelling and terrible to experience. This work remains relevant in a world where scholars are displaced by conflict, oppressive regimes, and climate change. Saïd asks, 'what is it exactly that exile affords you?' He explored the downsides and privileges of exile, namely that it grants us multiple perspectives, each corresponding to the places we have been and the multiple complexities in our experience and therefore written work.

In Application

In 1979, Saïd broadened the *Orientalism* argument to expose the underlying ethnocentric assumptions behind the idea that Islam is a homogenous and monolithic threat to US hegemony. He advocated that reporters and critics writing about the American embassy seizure in Iran 'develop a sense of internationalism and "worldliness" to grasp the events in the greater context of US involvement' in the country (2000, xxvi). While Western foreign policies over the past few decades have evolved in terms of seeing Islam as pluralistic, they have learned to manipulate sectarian differences towards creating further schisms in the Middle East and Muslim world. Post-2003 Iraq is a disastrous example of both ignorance and manipulation of sectarian differences.

Similar to Saïd's *Orientalizing* process, *sectarianization* (Mabon, 2020) is one where societies are conditioned via state and social institutions to view everything through a sectarian lens where systems of knowledge are formed around creating a sectarian hierarchy. As we engage with sectarianization discourse, we would benefit from revisiting Saïd's work and understanding how desectarianization unfolds and who determines what works for which society. Since 2003, discourse around Iraq has both Orientalized and sectarianized it. It has often externalized and reduced Iraqis to a passive polity awaiting liberation from a corrupt set of politicians who cannot fulfill promises, or a vengeful lot more concerned about settling old grievances than running their country (Hamoudi, 2008). The dangerous combination of Orientalizing and sectarianizing Iraq discourse now demands the decolonization of Iraq research.

The body of research on decolonization and the *decolonize the curriculum* (al Attar & Abdelkarim, 2021) movement has grown so much that it has been embedded in various fields, such as Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAAIL). As exciting as this may be, it is set to meet obstacles. Saïd described Orientalism as an eradicable system, resilient in the face of attempts to change the status quo. While universities and departments are increasingly adopting decolonization mandates and setting up Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion initiatives to combat racism, we see resistance. Toxic dynamics play out in anti-racism and decolonization discourse. Academics choose sides in a never-ending debate on the breadth of the problems of Orientalism and racism, what successful decolonization strategies entail, and when race is ever relevant. 'Why bring race into everything?' is a question we continue to hear in 2022 from the 'colour-blind'. 'White ignorance' continues to dominate International Law, Security Studies, Political Science, and other fields. As a concept, 'White Ignorance' explains the 'embedding of racial domination in modern thought alongside the denial of the centrality of racism in our social milieu' (Al-Attar, 2022). In contrast to conventional ignorance, 'white ignorance exposes both false belief and racial privilege'. It is not only about "not knowing" of racial domination's prominence, but of actively maintaining a "way of knowing" that refuses to acknowledge its prevalence' (*Ibid*).

Al-Attar (2022) explains that

...the rationale of aggressively cultivated ignorance is unmistakable. Acknowledging modernity's afterlives of racism would destabilise pillars upon which our epistemology sits: liberalism, meritocracy, and equality. White ignorance is a way of fighting back, of resisting enlightenment about racial injustice, of "refus[ing] to go quietly".

This, in addition to a growing trend where decolonization research is coopted by scholars of the 'Global North' and journals demand that decolonization scholars from the Global Majority cite them (Fúnez, 2022), emphasizes the relevance and continued significance of Edward Saïd's work today.

Issues to be Aware Of

Orientalism was subject to many criticisms (Mart et al., 2010), mainly from Orientalists such as Bernard Lewis (1982) who felt that their work's integrity was being attacked. Many criticisms today are from scholars who hold Saïd to a higher standard than that of a White scholar, faulting him for not studying Orientalist literature in more languages (Tarras, 2022). Scholars of the global majority are expected to read European languages and remain mute as Orientalists dominate the conversation (Saïd, 2001), while most Western scholars barely learn Arabic in their studies of the Middle East, or any other language relevant to their body of work, yet continue to dominate the conversation. This is something Saïd addressed in *Culture and Imperialism* and in *Covering Islam*. Holding scholars of the global majority to an impossible standard is to immobilize them while alive or make them irrelevant after death. Other criticisms described *Orientalism* as more personal, political, and polemical than scholarly and academic (Owen, 2012). However, such criticisms beg the question: is there such a thing as genuinely objective scholarship? The idea that we have no personal positionality in our research and impact on it is a myth sold to us by the West which pushed European and Western subjectivities as global objectivity.

Today, we see many scholars of the Middle East de-centering voices from the ground in their research and treating locals as mere subjects of study, not as collectives and individuals with personal stories and truths gravely impacted by this scholarship and its influences on foreign policy. Considering the personal dimension of our work invites us to be mindful of our positionalities in research. It invites us to be aware of subjective prejudices and portrayals of the 'other'.

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Antonio Gramsci

Bassel F. Salloukh⁹

All over the world, a number of scholars are “thinking in a Gramscian way about the present” without “rigidly ‘applying’ Gramsci’s concepts” (Morton, 2007). This is especially true today in studies of the Middle East, where Antonio Gramsci’s (1891-1937) social theory is increasingly deployed as an analytical toolkit to explain a range of urgent challenges and puzzles.

Intellectual Context

In his personal struggles and prison notebooks, the co-founder of the Italian Communist Party waged a tireless battle against deterministic, primarily economic interpretations, of Marxism, emphasizing the importance of sociological analysis and interpretations with the aim to develop a liberating *philosophy of praxis*, a more socially and historically nuanced Marxism, but one always grounded in material conditions or *lived experience*. His core concern was to theorize the durability of capitalism in advanced industrial societies and explain what prevented revolutionary change under this deeply exploitative system, but also how to overcome capitalism through revolutionary activity. His concerns are more urgent today in the context of even more socioeconomic inequality, globally but especially in the Middle East, and Gramsci left us a number of core concepts and ways of thinking that serve as sources of intellectual and methodological inspiration.

Key Argument

Most popular among these concepts is *hegemony*, the insight that individuals are not governed by force alone, but also by ideas. Gramsci conceived of hegemony as ‘political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class’ (Bates, 1975) in the political, economic, and cultural realms even under conditions of exploitation. *Civil society*, a mélange of private (or non-state) organizations, is the arena for the diffusion and popularization of this world view and the construction of ways of thought and social associations that form a culture. Hegemony is imposed on society by a ruling *historical bloc*, the alliance of classes or groups that dominate society at a given historical moment.

By contrast, in nonhegemonic contexts, due to the existence of articulated modes of production, the bourgeois classes (read regime or dominant elites outside advanced capitalist contexts) engage in a *passive revolution*: they initiate sweeping socioeconomic changes without concomitant political reforms – that is, without altering the dominant social order. In this case coercion is more visible and palpable in everyday life, unlike in hegemonic systems where the mechanisms of physical force are relegated to the background, only activated when consent unravels. This is not a binary, however, but rather an overall balance between coercion and consent.

⁹ I should like to thank Wadood Hamad, Toby Dodge, and Ibrahim Halawi for their rich Gramscian conversations.

In Gramsci's famous formulation, the state is composed of two mutually-reinforcing realms: *political society* with its legalistic and coercive measures and civil society. Yet as Peter Thomas insists, we should distinguish political and civil society from each other 'methodologically, not organically' and always 'within a unified (and indivisible) state form' (Thomas, 2009) that constitutes an *integral state* free from constructed binaries. It follows then that there are two routes to political change: a lightning and violent 1917 Russian Revolution-styled *war of maneuver* that takes control of the (then feudal-capitalist) state, an option he considered inappropriate in advanced industrial societies, and a much more protracted and difficult *war of position* that aims at producing an alternative counterhegemony and prepares the ideological and organizational infrastructure for that moment when the state can be toppled through a war of maneuver. But how to bring about revolutionary consciousness and change in this latter type of struggle?

In the battle for counter-hegemony, the role of the party, *The Modern Prince*, is to organize the *subaltern* politically and democratically and instil in them a revolutionary consciousness that demystifies the *common sense* manufactured by the dominant classes' agents of ideological diffusion. This hinges on the ability to promote *organic intellectuals* from these groups who maintain the party's link with its popular base. Organizing is thus the necessary condition for meaningful popular mobilization and cultural transformation. And this transformation is *molecular* rather than sudden and may pass through a number of overlapping phases along the difficult road from subordination to revolution (Chalcraft, 2022).

In Application

Any Gramscian engagement with the contemporary Middle East should start from where Gramsci himself starts. Adam Przeworski stated it best: 'Marx's lesson is that any analysis of life under capitalism must start from material conditions. Gramsci's addition is that it should not end there but it still must start there' (Przeworski, 2020). The other caveat involves how we deploy Gramsci's concepts: we should always remind ourselves that we are examining different capitalist formations than those Gramsci dissected. Consequently, alternative capitalist formations generate different state forms and social orders with their own material interests and disaggregated class relations that have to be analysed rather than assumed. Gramsci's concepts should thus be approached more as a toolkit for analysing contemporary social and political problems than rigid concepts to be duplicated uncritically. I am often much more comfortable deploying Gramsci's way of thinking, and how he gathers the material, organizational, and ideological to explain social orders and violent superstructures, than using his exact concepts or terms.

Nazih Ayubi's massive *Over-stating the Arab State* (1995) was one early English-language deployment of Gramsci's passive revolution to explain the durability of non-hegemonic authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, whether they are populist-corporatist or conservative-corporatist.¹⁰ The concept was rediscovered to explain how counter-revolutionary regimes are able to restore coercive control over their societies and restructure historical blocs (Gervasio, Manduchi, 2020).

Gramsci's notion of 'a crisis of authority', when 'the social basis supporting the basic structure of the political system was undermined, resulting in a breakdown of social consensus' (Morton, 2007), also

¹⁰ By contrast, Sara Salem (2020) has argued that Nasserism was an anticolonial hegemonic project, the first and last in Egypt.

serves to analyze the causes and afterlives of the popular protests that swept across the Middle East after 2011 and in 2015 and 2019. Gramsci's insights on subaltern mobilization explain variations in the trajectories of these protests and their prospects. Dense pre-crisis bottom-up organizational structures at the level of civil society helped achieve important breakthroughs even if these were later reversed, as in Tunisia, Egypt, and then Sudan. By contrast, where such organizational networks were not found or had to be invented in the midst of socioeconomic and financial crisis, prospects for change were limited, as in Lebanon and Iraq (Halawi, Salloukh, 2020). More importantly, Gramsci's insistence on the primacy of democratic organizing as a fulltime preoccupation, much like in his own life-activity, is an academy for how to do meaningful bottom-up activism as a prerequisite for social and political change (Chalcraft, 2022; Denning, 2021; Wald, 2022). For what Gramsci provides is the material and organizational corrective to otherwise abstract and mechanical theorizing and the kind of 'political hobbyism' (Hersh, 2020) often confused for intentional organization and strategic political action.

Most liberating, however, is the expansive image of the state Gramsci supplies for students of Middle East politics searching for an alternative to the presumed weak, absent, or fragile state. "The State," Gramsci writes, "is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (Gramsci, 1971). This image helps us gather the material, organizational, and ideological activities that go into producing a social order and its concomitant state form, one free of the imposed binaries of civil society/political society, consent/coercion, weak/strong state, the private/public sphere, state/non-state actors, and the formal/informal sectors (Salloukh, forthcoming). I find this toolkit especially useful in examining the durability of modes of sectarian consent, or its resistance through a protracted war of position (Dodge, 2019), one in which culture is an arena of struggle rather than a reified essence.

The aforementioned is but a selective snapshot of the possible deployments of Gramsci's toolkit in Middle East studies today. Ultimately, to think in a Gramscian way about our contemporary problems is to help invent "new conceptions that could make sense of and change particular histories and contexts" (Chalcraft, Marchi 2021). For who else other than Gramsci, in his biography and liberating insights, can shine the way forward in these dark times?

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Charles Tilly

Ibrahim Halawi

When Charles Tilly passed away in 2008, Columbia University president, Lee C. Bollinger, said that Tilly “literally wrote the book on the contentious dynamics and the ethnographic foundations of political history”.¹¹ He developed relational and process-based methods of research, as well as concepts and theories serving the study of contentious politics, social movements, history of labour, state formation, revolutions, democratization, identity, and inequality. Unsurprisingly then, he is considered by many the founder of historical sociology. Yet, very few scholars of the Middle East have taken inspiration from Tilly. So, this report will focus on Tilly’s input on the two most relevant issues to the Middle East, the state and revolution.

Intellectual Context

Firstly, one of his most popular contributions is on state formation, a term he later despised because of the teleological readings it invited. In crude and simple terms, Tilly (1975) argues that “war made the state and the state made war”. But, in application, Tilly is neither simplistic nor deterministic about state formation. The modern state was neither inevitable nor linear in its formation. He accounts for various contingencies behind the emergence of states, and, based on their fragile formation, they yielded various forms of contentions in the process of shuffling resource access. For instance, the process of border demarcation and social consolidation requires waging (internal and external) war. The necessity of waging war involves large-scale extraction and mobilisation of resources. Thus, the nation-state provided a durable structural form for capital accumulation needed for war. In this sense, Tilly sees war-making and state-making as one.

Another illuminating contribution is Tilly’s work on revolutions, a phenomenon often seen as alien to politics, or, in more conservative circles, a negation of nation-state. Instead, Tilly brings revolution back to politics, tracing its manifestation to the contentious nature of politics, particularly in the setting of modern states. In *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), Tilly does not consider revolution as a separate political phenomenon, but instead as a manifestation of contentious power relations. It is but one extension of violent and non-violent politics of collective action – or the ways in which people ‘act together in pursuit of shared interests’ (ibid).

Studying collective action – such as revolution – is particularly delicate because ‘collective action is about power and politics; it inevitably raises questions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, hope and hopelessness; the very setting of the problem is likely to include judgements about who has the right to act, and what good it does’ (ibid). This delicacy characterised in Tilly’s introduction to his work is reflected in the literature on revolutions where the ‘good’ revolutionaries are predetermined and the ‘bad’ state, or class, is also predetermined. With his typical sensibility, Tilly does not contradict this conviction either, when he clearly states that his own method of inquiry ‘is generally hostile to the collective action of governments and favorable to the collective action of ordinary people’ (ibid). Then, Tilly engages critically with this bias to unpack the restrictions that pre-

¹¹ See Bollinger’s statement here: <https://president.columbia.edu/news/passing-professor-charles-tilly>

determined moral standpoints create on studies of revolution. For instance, Tilly discusses how the concept of revolution is defined in several ways not only because the empirical is complex, but also because the definition itself lends itself to particular moral standpoints on what is good and bad (ibid). Power and politics are at the heart of revolution, and thus no definition of revolution can escape those limitations, knowing that for every definition, some choices must be made on what is and what isn't a revolution: coups, terrorism, slow industrial change, change from above, etc. (ibid).

In order to clear a good deal of conceptual ground, Tilly draws a distinction between a 'revolutionary situation' – the presence of more than one political bloc effectively exercising control over a significant part of the state apparatus – and a 'revolutionary outcome' – the displacement of one alliance of power holders by another (ibid). For a political setting to become revolutionary, a single, sovereign polity becomes the object of competing mutually exclusive claims by multiple blocs. However, a revolutionary situation can occur without necessarily resulting with revolutionary outcomes. For instance, an existing coalition of that controls the government can beat down an alliance of challengers after a period of revolutionary situation: a period of effective, competing, and mutually exclusive claims on government. Also, it is 'at least logically possible' for a revolutionary outcome to occur without a revolutionary situation, through gradual addition or subtraction from the ruling alliance (ibid).

Usually, at a given time, the revolutionary situation arrives at something between irrevocable split in a single polity and no multiple polity at all. Similarly, at a given time, the revolutionary outcome often sees something between the complete elimination of the ruling bloc and the maintenance or restoration of the status quo. Based on those variables, Tilly argues that 'politics as usual' is when the revolutionary situation sees no split and the revolutionary outcomes sees no elimination or addition of members of polity. In other words, within Tilly's theorisation, revolution is the intensification of politics, which is contentious by nature. When power blocs have mutually exclusive claims on government, the political setting becomes revolutionary. Therefore, Tilly's theorisation situates revolution in the context of power relations, and understands the phenomenon within the broader realm of politics.

In Application

Before Tilly set out his theorisation of revolution which I discussed earlier, he embarked on an extensive study of counterrevolution in the Vendée, west of France, in opposition to the French Revolution. Instead of falling for the usual pre-determined good-or-bad separation between revolution and counterrevolution, his concern was to understand what led the groups involved to endorse a particular side of the conflict, focusing on inconsistencies, divisions, and contentions within the groups involved, and their diverse and changing motives and interests (Tilly 1964).

In context, he shows that rural textile workers were hurt by the industrial crisis caused by the French Revolutionary economic reform laws that centralised power in the hands of merchants and landowners; and so joined the counterrevolutionary camp. The fact that this camp was primarily led by the clerical elite against the revolutionary state, Tilly argues, does not mean that the textile workers were supporting the old order of clerical rule. Such a reading of their mobilisation is rather shallow. Instead, their counterrevolutionary stance was chiefly motivated by their opposition to the revolutionary merchants (1964). This case illustrates how identifying a group's ideology (or identity) *does not* provide a sufficient explanation of its politics. It is access to resources, he argues,

that is pivotal in determining this (Tilly, 1973). ‘Resources’ refer not only to material capital, but also includes, among other things, arms, knowledge, communication tools and skills, social networks, loyalties, legislative rights, religious authority, legal and cultural privileges (ibid).

Tilly’s emphasis on resources is essentially a political economy approach to contentious politics. In the case of the Vendée, textile workers might not have mobilised under the banner of a clerical-led counterrevolution if they had had sufficient resources to mobilise and pursue their interests in other ways – i.e. through a non-binary opposition to the French Revolution. The monopolisation of resources by the French elite – mainly the clerics and the bourgeoisie – involved a pragmatic polarisation of political possibilities where the ability of interest groups and grassroots organisations to mobilise outside the elite-sponsored binary was largely restricted.

As his analysis of the Vendée shows, explanations of social conflict, be it sect-based or otherwise, that focus on the role of groups with presumably uniform interests downplay the contentious nature of politics, and precludes consideration of the contingencies that shape the motives and interests of groups and individuals, not least the various types of resources which people thrive to access.

Limitations

After more than half a century career, Tilly left us with a diverse and long list of seminal works. This typically means that one can either utilise some of his ideas as separate intellectual projects, or try to situate its meaning and value in a longer process of evolution of his thought. Despite sounding sensible, the latter approach is almost impossible in Tilly’s case, given how many ‘tangents’ he went on during his career. This leaves us with serious intellectual and ethical questions on how to approach his inter-disciplinary – if not anti-disciplinary, given how ambivalent he was to disciplinary orthodox – concepts, theories, and methods.

For instance, Tilly began with a rather structural approach to the study of the state. But, by 1990, as he diverted his attention to social movements and mobilisation, his work fundamentally shifted to ‘relational’ approaches (Tarrow 2018). However, there is a real challenge to using Tilly posed by his methodological breadth (or divergence?). It makes it seem that we have ‘many Tillys’. Not only that, but he also constantly shifts from macro to ‘determinedly micro levels of social reality’, while also trying to link the two levels (ibid). This makes his work difficult to get a bead on. Where does his work on revolution (and contentious politics more broadly) meet with his work on the state and war-making? These two major fields that he contributed to are left strikingly disconnected. The former field is largely how Tilly is visited in sociology, and the latter is largely seen as Tilly’s intervention in political science.

Final Remarks

If we are to synthesise Tilly’s vast work, we may find a potential solution to the agency vs structure dilemma that grips many scholars and students. Overall, Tilly manages to balance off structures and processes: the structures within which contentious politics manifest itself – particularly the state and society, and the interactive processes which define the prospects of political organisation and mobilisation. This reading of the political world departs from rigid categories and assumptions of good or bad, state and non-state, structure and agency, because it recognises the complex interaction between structurally-predictable phenomena and the contingencies of human interaction.

Surely then, Tilly can be the key to unlock the complexity of Middle East politics and its discontent and contentions. Not only does he offer a way out of the agency vs structure dilemma, he carefully navigates the sensitivity of studying contentious politics, particularly revolution, which inevitably invites moral and ideological prejudice. In short, Tilly did what other social theorists often struggle to do: to show, with empirical data, that even the most violent or volcanic manifestations of collective active are intrinsic to politics. What better instrument of knowledge to de-exceptionalise the 'war-torn', indeed 'state-torn', Middle East?

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Frantz Fanon

Lucia Ardovini

Frantz Omar Fanon (1925-1961), was one of the most influential writers in black Atlantic theory, specifically focusing on issues of anti-colonial liberation. Born in the island of Martinique in the West Indies under French colonial rule, he combined his own training in psychiatry and political philosophy to develop a revolutionary criticism of colonialism, race, gender and class. Throughout his work Fanon focused on the fundamental issues of his time – which still ring true today – ranging from language and affect to deep seated structural inequalities related to race, sexuality, religion, social formation and so on. As a Pan-Africanist and a Marxist, he developed a keen critique of colonization along with a roadmap for political, social and cultural decolonization. Described as “the most influential anticolonial thinker of his time” (Jansen and Jurgen, 2017), Fanon would go on to become a globally influential social theorist, whose views remain incredibly relevant to decolonial struggles today.

Intellectual content

In a general understanding, social theories are analytical frameworks used to examine social phenomena. Hence when talking about social theory, we are referencing ideas about ‘how societies change and develop, about methods of explaining social behaviour, about power and social structure, gender and ethnicity, modernity and ‘civilisation’, revolutions and utopias’ (Harrington, 2004). In contemporary social theory, and specifically in the case of Fanon, the focus is on themes such as the nature of social life, the relationship between self and society, the structure of social institutions, the role and possibility of social transformation, as well as issues of gender, race and class (Elliot, 2008). Referenced by literary theorists such as Edward Said in debates on colonial discourse (Prasad, 1992), Fanon produced some of the most revolutionary social theory and striking analyses of the psycho-existential contradictions of living under colonialism. His works – which draw on his own lived experiences of colonial rule in the West Indies and the Algerian revolutionary struggle – bring together key concepts of race, class, gender and colonialism in an intersectional way as a system of oppression.

Fanon’s two seminal works are *Black Skin, White Masks (Peau noire, masques blancs, 1952)* and *The Wretched of the Earth (Les damnés de la terre, 1961)*. In *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon lays the foundation for his following works on de and anti-colonial efforts, as he seeks to understand the foundation of anti-black racism in both consciousness and the social world. This is one of the first works that analyses the psychology of colonialism, with Fanon focusing on how the colonizer internalise colonialism and its related ideologies, and the colonized internalise the idea of their inferior status. The main argument here is that, therefore, racism acts as a controlling mechanism to maintain colonial relations as natural and unchangeable occurrences. Hence, starting from anti-black racism, the book develops critical reflections on racism, how it forms, and subsequently deforms both white and black subjectivities that are paramount to understand and challenge multiple levels of colonial subjugations. Overall, Fanon argues that the experience of racialised subjectivity shows that colonialism is a totalitarian project, which does not leave any part of social life or reality untouched.

Despite the overly pessimistic tone of the book, Fanon concludes that liberation is linked to revolutionary praxis, which will become central to his later works.

The Wretched of the Earth, which was informed by Fanon's experiences in revolutionary Algeria and by his later travels in sub-Saharan Africa. Almost 10 years after *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon makes the shift from colonialism being a matter of blackness to it encompassing the more general structural oppression of people in the Global South, while also recognising difference within the colonial experience. By providing a psychological analysis of the dehumanizing effects of colonization upon both individuals and colonised spaces, Fanon develops a broader social, cultural and political blueprint for a social movement aimed at decolonization. Starting from the premises that decolonization is, by definition, a violent process, the book moves through critiques of nationalism and imperialism to develop a revolutionary approach arguing that the development of class consciousness is central to the anti-colonial endeavour. In essence, Fanon clearly argues that the decolonization process does not end with national sovereignty but rather is a continuous struggle to introduce new forms of solidarity – which can only happen through the dismantling of the structural alienation and oppression embedded in the colonial system. Consequently, moving away from anti-Blackness as a core theme of his work and focusing instead on the impact of colonialism on cultural formation and political organization, in *Wretched of the Earth* Fanon directly engages with the meaning and purpose of revolutionary struggle.

This is based on Fanon's own experience of the Algerian War of Independence, which led him to state that “decolonization is always a violent process” (1961). It is important to point out here, however, that with this Fanon does not glorify violence *per se*, rather, he begins from the argument that ‘violence is the only language spoken by the colonist’ meaning that violence is the only way to respond to an inherently violent system, the way in which non-violence only seeks to empower the elites and the idea of violence as a cleansing force for colonised people (1966). According to Fanon, the colonial world can be understood as the encounter between two forces, those of the colonial settler and the native population, defined and sustained by violence (1961). Hence, non-violent resistance would only result in the preservation of the capitalist, colonial state. Therefore, in Fanon's understanding violence develops in two directions: internal to the colony and external in the formative conflict between the colonised and the colonisers (Ciccariello-Maher, 2017). In such a context violence is tasked with two indivisible tasks: the elimination of coloniality at the intellectual level (where colonized-colonisers relationships operate along the binary of inferiority and superiority); and the formation of post-colonial cultural, social and political identities. Building on this, in the conclusion Fanon articulates one of his most meaningful contributions to anti-colonial debates, arguing that post-colonial nations cannot merely be the duplication of European states. Understanding Europe to be heavily dependent on structures of exploitation, post-colonial nations need a different set of foundations and new imaginations of collectivity and of the social contract.

In application

Fanon's work is incredibly influential and was adopted by several anti-colonial and revolutionary movements globally, ranging from the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), The Black Panther Party in the US, and informed anti-imperial struggles in Asia and Africa as well as anti-monarchist revolutionaries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Today, Fanon's work remains seminal when it comes to the understanding of ongoing debates over the nature of racism, the legacy of colonial domination, and class oppression. This is where Fanon's work can be

used as a lens to analyse ongoing struggles in the MENA region, especially now that discourses over decolonization and critical assessments of the West and its institutions have come back to the fore, with the aim of challenging the legacy of hierarchical and racialised thinking towards minorities and other cultures. Overall, Fanon's works is more relevant today as we are still grappling with the same questions of how do we overcome racism, what it means to truly change a society, and of whether or not it is enough to overthrow a regime to instil political change.

Fanon's work was not as well received in the MENA region as it was in other locations, mostly because of its harsh criticism of national bourgeoisie, which at the time has seized power and begun to act as an intermediary class between western powers and local populations. This is the case in Israel's occupation of Palestine, where Fanon's work has been and remains a crucial analytical tool to make sense of the ongoing struggle for liberation. Yet, in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, Fanon can indeed be used as a lens to make sense of the ongoing disorder in the region. Scholars such as Anthony Alessandrini, Nigel Gibson and Jasmine Gani, among others, argue that Fanon's work sheds critical insights into the role of ruling elites, nationalist forces and deep state institutions in the region, especially when it comes to their resilience against the increasing number of liberation movements

This specifically applies to the analysis of the failure of the uprisings, which saw regimes being toppled only to be replaced by other authoritarian and neo-colonial forms of domination, and to ongoing struggles against the legacy of sectarian governments and identities. This is not surprising according to Fanon, who saw the lack of liberatory ideologies as the greatest threat to decolonial and liberation movement, resulting in so-called revolutions repeating and reproducing the very system of oppression that they initially set out to challenge. To overcome this, what is needed is move away from nationalist and neoliberal ideologies in favour of a new form of humanism, bringing together all of the "wretched" who are denied agency and political space.

This is a key part of the liberation process according to Fanon, and applying a Fanonian lens to the current state of politics and society in the MENA, one can see that despite the fact that the anti-colonial struggle is still very much underway, a new page has been turned and we are entering a new historical era (Gibson, 2003). Therefore, through a Fanonian lens, one can argue that the process of decolonisation in the MENA has indeed been re-invigorated, as witnessed by the rise of new forms of Arab, national and transnational consciousness that followed the uprisings and continued instances of popular revolt and resistance. Ultimately, Fanon's work is crucial to highlight the need to understand today's political and social turmoil in the region as intrinsically related to the historical legacy and practice of colonialism, which continues to take on new forms.

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Michel Foucault

John Nagle

Michel Foucault (1926) is undoubtedly one of the leading social theorists of the twentieth century. His work on the relationship between power and knowledge remains both highly influential and controversial. He is unfairly labelled by detractors as a ‘cultural Marxist’ and a postmodernist, an intellectual for whom truth is always relative. Yet his writings - informed by a unique historiographical approach - demonstrate a highly detailed analysis of how modernity and the new forms of governance it inaugurated have generated powerful forces which shape our societies.

Intellectual Contribution

Michel Foucault’s work escapes easy disciplinary categorisation. His writings effortlessly integrate sociology, political philosophy, and the history of medicine and science. A central thread running through his work is the relationship between knowledge and power. The inextricable binding of these forms led Foucault to coin the neologism ‘power-knowledge’ (*le savoir-pouvoir*). For Foucault, knowledge and power are co-produced: the deployment of power requires legitimation through modes of knowledge and knowledge is always dependent on structures of power.

Knowledge and power are not things in themselves; they are contingent and dynamic properties dependent on historical forces and thus socially constructed and subject to negotiation, contestation and change. ‘Truth’, for Foucault (1980), ‘is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint’. It is here where Foucault deploys historiography – what he describes as ‘an archaeology of knowledge’ – to reveal how knowledge-power has been transformed through the arrival of modernity. While power was once the preserve of the sovereign – monarchs and despots – it has increasingly become dispersed through a dense network of institutions and processes that circulate discourses of knowledge. For Foucault, knowledge-power is now contained in a ‘*dispositif*’, a ‘thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions’ (Foucault, 1980).

Foucault illuminates the contingent and changing character of knowledge-power through several lengthy treatises on madness, surveillance, and punishment. These examples are brought together most notably in Foucault’s four-volume *History of Sexuality*. Foucault traces how our understanding and deployment of sexuality has gone through a major transformation since the eighteenth century. While sexuality was once a matter exclusively left to the domain of religious institutions, by the Victorian era it was enmeshed within the nexus of discourses and practices proliferated by the *dispositif* of medicine, science, psychology and religion. Sexuality had become transformed from a practice – what one did – to an identity – what one is. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explains that it’s not that same-sex relationships or desires didn’t exist before — they did. What’s relatively new, though, is 1) the idea that our sexual desires reveal some fundamental truth about who we are, and 2) the conviction that we have an obligation to seek out that truth and ‘confess’ it.

As illustration, Foucault points to how the categories of heterosexual and homosexual were first constructed in the nineteenth centuries. A host of institutions and new sociopolitical formations –

ranging from the Church, psychiatry, sexology and more broadly, bourgeois capitalist society – forged new discourses and practices regarding what was understood to be ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ sexuality. A binary is made in western society between ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ heterosexuality and ‘abnormal’ and ‘unhealthy’ homosexuality. In these new categories, we see the co-production of knowledge-power. The construction of knowledge on sexuality via the *dispositif* legitimates expressions of power, particularly the power to surveil and punish alleged sexual transgressives.

Foucault goes beyond mere description of the changing construction of sexuality; he addresses the factors that drive transformation. For this, Foucault develops the concept of ‘biopolitics’. Biopolitics, writes Foucault, is ‘power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them’ (1978). Biopower, therefore, exposes the structure, relations, and practices by which political subjects are constituted and deployed, along with the forces that have shaped and continue to shape modernity (Foucault, 1982; Inda, 2008). According to Foucault (1980), the technologies of government underwent a ‘very profound transformation’ of the mechanisms of power’, so that the goal of governance is primarily concerned with the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity and health. With biopolitics, governance focuses on the population at ‘the level of its aggregate effects’ (Foucault, 2000); it regulates the phenomena that typify groups of human beings, including ‘propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary’ (Foucault, 1980).

For Foucault, the construction of sexuality – both hetero and homosexuality – as a social category is a product of biopower. Biopower embraces two complementary forms of disciplinary power, one that works on the individual and the other on society (Foucault 1980; 1982). While the former is a power that exercises itself on the body to create docile bodies that are economically useful, the latter is concerned with the reproductive capacity of the population. It is within these configurations of biopower that sexuality is a matter of a healthy functioning state and that health means normality and pathology is deviance. In the new medical discourses, ‘homosexuality’ was a descriptor of a deviation from a developmental norm and thus had to be ‘corrected’ through interventionist forms of disciplinary power that served the good of the body politic (Foucault, 1980).

It is not only sexuality that biopower shapes and regulates; practically any form of political subjectivity can be constructed via governance. Biopolitical governance consists of at least two connected elements. First, the art of governing is possible only within particular epistemological regimes of intelligibility – the construction of knowledge about populations that render them thinkable so as to make them amenable to political programming. Biopolitics is a problematizing sphere of activity (Inda, 2008). Problems – ranging from urban unrest, and economic downturns and ethnic conflict – need to be defined and classified in particular ways so that concrete policies can be formulated as solutions and thus amenable to the apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. Second, to expedite a solution, biopolitical governance aims to cultivate particular types of collective agency and subjectivity, particularly forms of citizenship (Foucault, 1982).

In Application

Foucault’s major works almost exclusively limit their focus on Western modernity. Foucault rarely considered the Middle East in his major works, though he met the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini (then exiled in Paris) and travelled to Iran in 1978 where

he documented the emerging Iranian revolution in a series of supportive pieces (Afary, Anderson 2010). Problematically, Foucault dismissed feminist critiques of the revolution. Yet, given the centrality of the ‘West’ in his main analysis, to what extent have his writings been used for (and by) scholars of the MENA region?

Edward Said was highly influenced by Foucault’s rendering of power-knowledge. Said’s development of colonial discourse theory and Orientalism are clearly indebted to Foucault. The discursive construction of the Orient by the West is an example of how regimes of knowledge underpin relations of power that justify brutal Western intervention into the region (Said, 1978). Indeed, as Said (1983) acknowledged. ‘The parallel between Foucault’s carceral system and Orientalism is striking’. In a provocative intervention, Joseph Massad (2002) deploys a Foucauldian perspective to critique the emergence of LGBTQ rights groups in the MENA (particularly Lebanon). Massad’s argument is that the West has essentially imported fixed categories of sexuality - especially the binary of the straight-gay paradigm - into the region. Massad notes that the construction of the category of ‘homosexual’ as a clearly defined subject and identity that requires recognition and rights is relatively modern and a product of western state formations. For Massad, these sexual categories become problematic and dangerous when they are made ‘universalizable’ and applied to the rest of the world with a missionary zeal. These concepts about sexuality essentially serve a neocolonial political project which legitimates the idea of gay Arabs needing to be liberated and protected by western actors.

In an innovative approach, Bassel Salloukh et al (2015) have essentially used a biopolitical approach to analyse Lebanon’s political sectarian system. The power-sharing system operates as a dispositif – an apparatus of institutions and practices – that discipline and cultivate sectarian forms of subjectivity. These works, of course, only briefly touch upon the vast range of scholarly research on the MENA that draws on Foucauldian theory.

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Achille Mbembe

Madonna Kalousian

In an essay titled ‘Écrire l’Afrique à partir d’une faille’, Mbembe contends that “c’est parce que la colonisation fut ce qu’elle fut qu’il nous est interdit d’oublier F. Fanon” (Mbembe, 1993) meaning that because colonization was what it was, we are forbidden from ever forgetting Fanon. With a critical recourse to Homi Bhabha’s “‘projective disincorporation’ by the marginal of the Master” (Bhabha, 1992), Mbembe draws on Fanon’s psychoanalytic theorisation of race, subject formation, and the exclusion of colonised subjectivities in order to mediate a rereading of the construction of colonial relations and postcolonial institutional violence (Fanon, 1967). Spanning in many ways the complex paradoxes of a human-animal dichotomy, Mbembe’s intellectual approach to the necropolitical calculus of colonialism, postcolonialism, empire-building, and other forms of violence remedies the foundational interrogations of discourses of philosophy, political science, psychoanalysis, and literary criticism today.

In Theory

Mbembe’s rereading of postcolonial theory inaugurates a discourse around ‘the postcolony’. His *On the Postcolony* is an exposé of the implicit assumptions, operations, and epistemologies upon which the dehumanizing operations of colonial and post-colonial power in Africa are premised (Mbembe, 2011). It traces the genealogy of sovereign power as it passes under many names, endures, and changes across time and space. For Mbembe, “the notion ‘postcolony’ identifies specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves” (ibid) While Mbembe’s framework remains profoundly indebted to a long history of critical thought sketching out discourses of colonialism, *On the Postcolony* also redefines of the foundational interrogations of contemporary postcolonial theory:

Economic activity is increasingly like war activity. Roads are cut, cargoes high-jacked, convoys escorted, security services hired – making clear that the boundaries between production, extortion and predation have been blurred. No one knows very clearly any more what belongs to whom, and who has a right to what, still less who must be excluded and why. The immediate consequences of institutional violence and the logic of rioting are to prevent any effective consolidation of so-called civil society while rendering the State totally impotent (Mbembe, 2011).

For Mbembe, processes of decolonisation reinforce and are accompanied by a systematic exercise of coercion administered by a state whose legitimacy is premised upon the regularisation of a postcolony’s resistant social sphere. These social spheres are gradually overtaken by a set of zones of exclusion managing the life and administering the death of subjects relegated into their margins. Grounding its operations in discreetly legalised forms of extreme violence, such as murder, torture, compulsory disappearance, mass killing, genocide, and war as noted by Mbembe himself above, the architecture of a zone of exclusion “defies easy imagination” (Wadiwel, 2002). It is “something for which we perhaps have no name”, as Agamben tells us (2002). The multifaceted interchange between this indefiniteness and perpetuity seeks to benefit from a suspension of the rule of law and from an

intentionally ill-defined overlap between biopolitics, conformity, legality, rightfulness, legitimacy, and validity. Echoing Agamben's emphasis on the unnameability of this space, Arthur Bradley identifies a set of "shadowy dramatis personae on the crowded stage of contemporary biopolitics" (Bradley, 2019), including, for example, Judith Butler's precarious life, Eric Santner's creaturely life, Roberto Esposito's immunized life, as well as his own unbearable life.

Mbembe's necropolitics, as I conceive of it, evokes an interplay between these competing conceptualisations of biopolitics, reiterating and operating within what Mbembe terms "repressed topographies of cruelty" (Mbembe, 2019). The correlation Mbembe envisages between anthropocentric violence perpetuated against animals, the dehumanisation of subjectivities under sovereign power, and contemporary manifestations of biopolitics retains a central position to his critique of nihilopower, or political erasure, as Bradley terms it, confining certain forms of life into not only an indeterminate zone of exclusion, but also into an indefinite inexistence where they are rendered un-lived, consigned to a virtual sphere beyond both the living and the dead.

In Practice

Mbembe's outline of the abjection of 'the animal' in the postcolony merits further theoretical reflection. Capturing the realities of political erasure through a pervasive logic of dehumanisation parallels the conception of animality as a category in need of rehabilitation in order for the sovereign to be able to claim to be offering a "legitimate, but good, [...] service to the community" which resides outside (Sanchez, Zahavi, 2018). Paradigms of excluding 'the animal' are replicated in exclusionary colonial definitions of 'the human':

That colonies might be ruled over in absolute lawlessness stems from the racial denial of any common bond between the conqueror and the native. In the eyes of the conqueror, *savage life* is just another form of *animal life* [italics in original], a horrifying experience, something alien beyond imagination or comprehension. In fact, according to Arendt, what makes the savages different from other human beings is less the colour of their skin than the fear that they behave like a part of nature (Mbembe, 2019).

Similarly, in his introduction to *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe argues that Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of 'human nature.' Or, when it is, its things and attributes are generally of lesser value little importance, and poor quality. It is this elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest of humankind [...]. Discourse on Africa is almost always deployed in the framework (or on the fringes) of a meta-text about the *animal* – to be exact, about the *beast* [italics and brackets in original] (Mbembe, 2011).

In Mbembe's evocation of the above human-animal dichotomy, the question is not whether Mbembe reduces colonisation and its aftermath into a discourse of depoliticization, subjugation, and exclusion as experienced by 'the animal'. What is at stake here is to identify parallel paradigms through which colonialism turns targeted sites into sites of exclusion in which life becomes the mere subject of a deliberately arbitrary political rule. Therefore, 'the animal' is not a metaphor or a literary allegory for

exclusion, but rather a paradigm and an analytical tool through which one can rethink the anthropocentrism of both sovereignty and colonialism.¹²

A comprehensive engagement with the various contexts against which Mbembe's theoretical programme can be read is beyond the scope of this short essay. His theorisation of anthropocentric violence, colonialism, capitalism, the right to kill, and the redefining of the human under these conditions have been widely used by scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds in order to navigate a variety of pressing questions in and for the region of West Asia. Some recent examples include *Revolutions Aesthetic* by Max Weiss who builds on Mbembe's necropolitics in order to advance an understanding of the management of life and arrangement of death within the context of the war in Syria. Developing a framework for reading Syrian war literature, Weiss deploys what he refers to as a necroaesthetics, "the assemblage of literary, cinematic, artistic, and performative discourses orientated around representation of various dimensions of death, dying, and dead bodies" (Weiss, 2022). Deepening an understanding of the dead and/or missing body in occupied Palestine, *Buried in the Red Dirt* by Frances Hasso builds on Mbembe's necro-colonial sovereignty in order to expose the complex mechanisms through which British and Zionist settler colonialism has reduced the body into political capital. Within this framework of analysis, Hasso contends that "the necropolitics of the Department of Health, which answered to the Colonial Office and the Treasury in London, was built on a logic of austerity and developmental extraction from a Palestinian population considered disposable" (Hasso, 2022). Finally, evoking an understanding of places where colonial violence coincides, reproduces, and is dependent on the redefining of the refugee child "as both biopolitical figure and as post/colonial subject" (Ball, 2019), Anna Ball brings together complementing readings of Mbembe's necropolitics, further advancing an understanding of the impact Europe's immigration policies have had on the lives of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers¹³.

In Retrospect

Wadiwel contends that, in Mbembe's approach to the biopolitical capture of animal life within the postcolony, "the opportunity for linking violence towards animals with the colonial experience [...] appears missed" (Wadiwel, 2002). While Wadiwel's critique of Mbembe's rethinking of colonial violence within the framework of a human-animal dialectic does not itself illuminate what exact interrelations between the two experiences have been missed, I believe that what is at stake here is not these interrelations themselves, but rather what Mbembe's implementation of this dynamic reveals about his own critical assessment of the extent to which one can assume that human sovereignty over 'the animal' is necessarily necropolitical. Grounding his critique of colonial sovereignty in a discourse of human sovereignty, Mbembe argues that the fact that "colonies might be ruled over in absolute lawlessness stems from the racial denial of any common bond between the conqueror and the native. In the eyes of the conqueror, savage life is just another form of animal life" (Mbembe, 2019).

¹² See also Mbembe's understanding of the nonhuman within the context of colonial oppression in Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. by Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017)

¹³ Mbembe's nexus of postcolonial studies, animal studies, and environmental humanities brings into a new light the wider implications of interspecies necropolitics in the postcolony. See, for example, Jonathan Saha, *Colonizing Animals: Interspecies Empire in Myanmar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Paula Butler, *Colonia; Extractions: Race and Canadian Mining in Contemporary Africa* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); and Sundhya Walther, *Multispecies Modernity: Disorderly Life in Postcolonial Literature* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2021).

In overlooking the possibility that ‘the human’, however, may not, by default and at any time, be able to exercise sovereignty over an ‘inferior’ animal other, Mbembe also overlooks the possibility that ‘the animal’ too enacts its own manifestations of a particular form of life within a realm of existence where a materialisation of a distinctive type of *biosis* not unthinkable. Mbembe’s conceptualisation of necropolitics, therefore, remains anthropocentric as it “takes for granted the human dominance of animals” (Saha, 2022). Echoing an Agambanian within-man caesura, (Agamben, 2002) Mbembe overlooks the possibility that animal/other lives are already in possession of a political gesturality that does manifest itself outside the realm of ‘the human’.

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Peter Berger

Mustafa Menshawy

Peter Berger is interested in a key puzzle related to the creation and evolution of religion. Religion is mainly a social construct or a human activity, but man loses control of this construction process. Along the lines of functionalist schools of thought in the sociology of religion such as Emile Durkheim (1961), Berger conceptualises religion as a social construct or, as he phrased it ‘worlds are socially constructed or socially maintained.’ (Berger, 1969) However, this construction is qualified in a ‘dialectical’ relationship under which it is a ‘human product, and nothing but a human product, that continuously acts back upon its producer’ (ibid) as Berger succinctly put it in his seminal reading *The Sacred Canopy*. Berger resolves the puzzle through identifying three categories: objectivation, externalisation and internalisation. Nevertheless, his solutions, or perhaps the application thereof, create new puzzles or problems appertaining to agency and situating the individual within the religious landscape.

Berger in Theory

Religion is a human activity but it attains the status of ‘objective reality’ or what Berger (1969) calls ‘coercive factivity’ in a number of ways. The sacredness of religion is institutionalised into historical roots. In other words, every religious practice finds for itself a history older than it. As such, this practice which is made out of the ground or *ex nihilo* can thus appear as ‘the manifestation of something that has been existent from the beginning of time, or at least from the beginning of this group.’ (ibid). We can argue that religion thus comprises of a conflation of tenses where the present is an extension of the past.

Along with objectivation, the malleability of constructing and reconstructing religion is neutralised by what Berger terms ‘plausibility structures’. These are structures which can fixate specific meanings, shapes or features of religion through material and non-material aspects of culture. Think of holy books such as the Bible and Qur’an or rituals repeating again and again what is mentioned in them by followers of each religion. The performance of sacramental acts or prayers, or what Berger calls ‘religious motifs’ as specific pattern or gestalt of religious experience as it continues over a period of time’ (Berger, 1984), by reiterativeness. Structures can be also physical such as mosques or shrines which followers visit and pray. All these plausibility structures add what I elsewhere call ‘discursive alignment’¹⁴, that is where different discourses coalesce into building a specifically shaped entity such as religions. Berger demonstrated how this plausibility empowers religion as a force of legitimation. He mentions the ‘paraphernalia and ritualism’ of death during ‘official exercise of violence’ such as wars. Having an individual sent to war or being killed in it is *celebrated* rather than *regretted* or lamented through prayers and blessings as the ‘ecstasies of fear and violence are, by these means, kept within the boundaries of “sanity”, that is, of the reality of the social world (Berger, 1969).

¹⁴ For further readings on alignments across discourse, see Menshawy, M., 2021. Sovereignty alignment process: strategies of regime survival in Egypt, Libya and Syria. *Third World Quarterly*, 42(12), pp.2804-2821.

Through objectivation and plausibility structures existing ‘outside’ our own consciousness’(ibid), religion stands as an external reality confronting us, i.e. the producers of religion, as ‘factivity external to and other than to themselves.’(ibid) However, part of the process includes internalisation under which we have to ‘reappropriate’ this same reality by transforming it from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness (ibid).’ Just to stay with the example of killing in the name of religion, a man has to replace the ‘real self’, which is afraid and has scruples, by internalising the objectivated reality under which she or has to play the role of ‘self *qua* role-carrier (warrior, hangman and what not, in which roles he may act the hero, the merciless avenger, and so on)’ (ibid).

Berger in Application

Berger’s theory can help us understand and explain reality of Middle East politics including - but not limited to - growing tension between the Sunnis and Shias and their alleged political manifestations of Saudi-Iranian rivalry. For example, let us take this specific statement made in May 2017, by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman who said dialogue with Iran is impossible. His reasons are mainly religious with him saying that Iran’s actions and ideology are based on the belief that ‘The Imam Mahdi will come and they must prepare the fertile environment for (his) arrival ... and they must control the Muslim world.’ (Aboudi, Fahmy, 2017) Accordingly, he elaborated, ‘we know the aim of the Iranian regime is to reach the focal point of Muslims (Mecca)’. (ibid)

Religion turns this mere statement, a human activity or production by being Bin Salman’s words, into ‘objective reality’ as if it is extraneous to his subjective consciousness or, to follow Berger, being ‘out there’. His words gain ‘ultimately valid ontological status’ (Berger, 1969) by historicization. He bases his argument on a specific historical disagreement over the leadership of the Muslim community after the death of Prophet Muhammad and over the latter’s succession leading to the subsequent killing of the Prophet’s grandson, Hussein ibn Ali, at the hands of forces loyal to the Umayyad caliph Yazid in the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD. The disagreement is the base of sectarian perceptions under which the Shia perceive the Sunni as supporters of power usurpation and the Sunni perceive the Shia as ‘apostates’ deviating from ‘true Islam’ and seeking to reverse history in their favour. Bin Salman also builds his own plausibility structures, possibly discursive by reiteration by others within state institutions and bodies sponsored, instigated or financed by the Saudi regime. For example, many religious scholars have apostatised the Shiite in Syria and Iraq, stating that jihadi fighters should ‘kill them’ (Darwich, Fakhoury, 2016).

The same applies to the discourses on the other side. For example, Iran and Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah justified their military involvement in Syria after 2011 in religious terms supported with plausibility structures such as protecting Shia sites in Syria, prominently including shrine of Zaynab. Zaynab was one of the only surviving adult members of the Prophet’s family after Imam Hussein’s death at the hands of Yazid, a tyrannical ruler of Iraq, in the 7th-century epic Karbala battle. Iranian fighters in Syria mobilized in different ways across these lines such naming their battalion ‘the Defenders of Zaynab’, thus contributing to internalising this belief among the Iranians. This is a letter carried by Iran’s official media and sent by a young Iranian woman to her fallen husband, a pro-Assad fighter in Syria: ‘This shrine [the Zaynab shrine] is sacred ... I am worried about people who throw stones at it and so I sent you to protect it. But I, like you, are immersed in the love of Zaynab and that is what keeps me strong in your absence’ (Kemalli, 2017).

Death thus ‘makes sense’ to the wife as religion treats it as a ‘marginal situation’ and integrates it into a comprehensive ‘nomos’. Berger’s words. Debating whether Iran should join the Syrian conflict or incur losses is out of the question as the matter is linked to an ultimate reality grounded in what Berger calls the ‘sacred *realissimum*, which by definition is beyond the contingencies of human meanings and human activity.’ (Berger, 1969)

Issues to be Aware Of

Berger’s theory faces the criticism of de-individualisation. The individual’s capacity to act and manifestations of this capacity in actions are limited as she or he is thus always part of the group or society with ‘social structures within which this reality is taken for granted’ (Berger, 1969) the individual has no ‘choice’ but to set his life ‘co-extensive’ with the dominant religious world, and challenging the latter would imply the ‘the threat of anomy’ (ibid). Religion is based on the ‘surrender of the self to the ordering power of society (ibid).’ Scholars criticise this argument as ‘fundamental though irrational.’ (Harvey, 1973) Although man creates religion, in Berger’s viewpoint, the creation is followed by a ‘severance’ (Berger, 1969) between man and her or his product. Berger’s argument is closer to that of Durkheim and his idea of ‘collective conscience’ permeating and shaping the behaviour of individuals, and distance itself from rational choice theories based on the ‘supply side’ (Stark, Bainbridge, 1985) empowering individuals against religion (perhaps this opens the door for a comparison or a link with another lacking in literature related to religion-based phenomena such as sectarianism where scholars mainly under-explore individuals at the expense of what is collective and totalising)

Aware of the potential criticism, Berger dedicated space to consolidating his argument on basis of power relations. Man is weaker in front of religion as human, unlike other species, is basically ‘unfinished’ at birth with an instinctual ‘instability’ in man’s relations with the outside world (Berger, 1969). Man is the one in need for religion to construct and stabilise her or his relations with the surrounding world, or what Berger calls ‘world-maintaining’ function or elsewhere refers to as ‘order.’ Religion is thus more powerful enough to gain the ‘capacity to impose itself upon the reluctance of individuals (ibid). ‘Religion will remain powerful by being in need to bring in stability and order to a reality that is ‘inherently precarious.’ (ibid) However, as remainder of the dialectically-based relations remain, order brings with in disorder since religion is used and functionalised within a hostile, dichotomous and oppositional environment. Berger defines religion as: ‘The establishment, through human activity, of an all-embracing sacred order, that is, of a sacred cosmos that will be capable of maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos. Every human society, however, must maintain its solidarity in the face of chaos... The world of sacred order, by virtue of being an ongoing human production, is ongoingly confronted with the disordering forces of human existence in time’ (ibid).

This brings in another confusion as per Berger’s conceptualisation. Religion’s dominance cannot be guaranteed in a multiple environment full of different versions of religions with contradictory plausibility structures. Meanings are always negotiated, contested and falsified in the post-structuralist sense of being a process of shifts within power and resistance. Indeed, Berger realises this confusion by showing how religion can play contradictory functions including disordering surrounding world by another alienation/dis-alienation dichotomy. Berger’s contention is thus based on the premise of a

paradox: Religion can be both world-maintaining and world-shaking force, and this again can help us apply Berger to the Middle East politics where we can identify dynamics drawn on such duality¹⁵

Conclusion

Berger focuses on less on substance of religion and more on its functions and uses. He takes it as ‘the historically most widespread and effective instrumentality of legitimation.’ (Berger, 1963) The legitimation evolves within objectivation as if religion is an objective reality. This reality exists ‘outside’ of man’s own consciousness. Any consciousness man owns is ‘false’ as man is given the impression that he cannot change religion, a ‘human activity’ in Berger’s words. Man has further to internalise religion by necessity not choice especially as religion gains a dominant power with all of its plausibility structures adding to its factivity. Still, man can still resist or challenge his lost power in the ‘dialectical’ relationship since religious beliefs and traditions can be made fragile in a precarious surrounding full of conflictual interests, contradictory ideologies and competitive agents as the Middle East region can attest to.

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¹⁵ See the duality of Wahhabism as ordering/disordering force in the Saudi-Qatari relations



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Hannah Arendt

Adel Ruished

The late Iraqi Poet Muthafar al-Nawab once said that "if you see an Arab sleeping hasten to wake him up so that he does not dream of freedom" (al-Dik, 2013). Al-Nawab's poem was written in the context of his criticism of ruling regimes in the Arab World for chronic suppression of freedom of its peoples (al-Jazeera, 2022). This poem about freedom in the Arab World evokes the work of Hannah Arendt whose social theory and work on revolution is fundamentally concerned with the concept of freedom.

Intellectual context

Significantly, the scholarly work of Hannah Arendt embodied her personal and life experiences. In this regard, Arendt was born into a secular German Jewish family, from where she was forced to flee, first to France and then to the United States after the emergence of the Nazi party and its totalitarian ideology in 1933. Before managing to escape, the Nazi regime had imprisoned Arendt and revoked her German citizenship, (al-Halosh, 2020). There is little doubt this impacted Arendt's thought. In an effort to highlight draconian measures of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, Arendt produced her first scholarly work in the United States under the title of "The Origins of Totalitarianism". In this seminal text, Arendt explored the nature of the totalitarian ruling phenomenon and its impact on freedom and human rights (Arendt, 1951). Subsequently, Arendt analysed the French, American and Russian revolutions. In exploring these revolutions, Arendt attempted to offer an engagement with the concept of revolution, through which she meant to provide a recipe for challenging sovereign power's excessive suppression of people freedom, democracy and human right (Arendt, 1965).

Key Argument

One of Arendt's key arguments about freedom is that revolutionary movements must understand that liberation is not the final objective of mass revolutions. For her, the ultimate destination for revolutions must be achieving freedom, noting that liberation represents the means to achieve such freedom (Salikov, 2017). Hence, Arendt crucially considered that freedom, not justice or greatness, represents the highest criterion for judging the constitution of political bodies. Hence, she concluded that the concept of revolution must work in conjunction with the concept of freedom (Arendt, 1965).

According to Abed al-Rahman al-Halosh, Arendt holds freedom as the ability of men to exercise freedom wherein human being must exercise this freedom in observable way, through acting, practicing and criticizing in the public realm (al-Halosh, 2020). In her book "The Human Condition", Arendt stresses the importance for the individual human being to move beyond private life and join the public realm and unite in political congregations to live free and dignified life. In this regard, Arendt notes that private familial life is necessary feature for upbringing and refinement of the individual.

Moreover, she understands that labour is valorised because it covers needs of daily life and fills in leisure time. Yet, these necessities must not come at the expense of engaging in free and active

political participation in the public sphere (Arendt, 1958). As such, Arendt holds that free and dignified life is not only related to achieving material and economic satisfaction, but also concerned with liberation from political oppression, injustice, inequality and social alienation (Arendt, 1958).

Of interest, Arendt considered modernity with all its features of wealth accumulation, property ownership and economic and industrial developments as playing a key role in rupturing societal cohesiveness and turning the individual into slave of technological appliances and bureaucratic administrations (Melfi, 2016). In addition, these modern features emptied political life from its content, weakened social solidarity and deepened social alienation (Arendt, 1958).

Arendt envisages freedom as the apex achievement for revolutions to protest excessive policies of sovereign power and capitalist greed in modern times (Salikov, 2017). Indeed, Arendt states that engagement in revolutions provides opportunities to join the public realm and develop a sense of self-worth, societal belonging and solidarity. In addition, this engagement offers opportunities for individuals to act, appear, speak and exchange opinions about best revolutionary approaches to create a free political life and achieve social justice. As such, revolutions came to represent essential political events capable of devising effective action to liberate society from unjust and unequal policies and establish freedom (Arendt, 1958).

Significantly, Arendt notes that a compatibility of perspectives among engaged individuals in the public sphere will weaken and subvert the endeavour of revolutions. In contrast, a difference in opinion enables productive and efficient resistant techniques as long as those involved do not change their identity and main object (Arendt, 1958). She also notes that such revolutions will inevitably resort to some violence to give voice of wretched people.

Although Arendt calls for a peaceful type of protest such as organized mass demonstrations, sit-ins, public and hunger strikes, she concurs that violence pays and brings attention to disenfranchised groups (Arendt, 1969). In this regard, Arendt clarifies that while the basic goal of revolution is an end to tyranny and achieving freedom, it will more often lead to the outbreak of war with all its violence and damage. Thus, people may have to face violence if they are to gain political freedom (Arendt, 1965). Moreover, Arendt alludes to the impact of external interference and intervention on revolutions and warns us that sovereign power or business elites may attempt to co-opt revolution leaders and subvert liberation efforts of revolutionary movements. Finally, Arendt bemoans that many leaders of revolutionary movements have the capacity to turn into new elites engaging in discrimination and coercive strategies, ultimately indulging in similar policies that they initially protested and challenged (Salikov, 2017).

In application

With the beginning of the so-called "Arab Spring" revolutions, hope substantially increased to overturn the saying of al-Nawab about the dream of freedom in the Arab World. At stake was the dream of achieving political freedom and the amelioration of dire socio-economic and human rights conditions of Arab people (al-Dik, 2013). Yet, most of these revolutions were soon to fail, prompting some political analysts to consider them incomplete, or to characterize them instead as large-scale social uprisings. Significantly, these analysts resorted to re-reading Arendt's perspective on revolution which prompted an analysis based on analogizing freedom with the notion of new beginnings. In this regard, Mutaz Mamdouh argued that while most of the "Arab Spring" revolutions were radical and

brought about an end to some authoritarian traits, they did not ultimately break with the previous political and socio-economic contexts of the Arab states (Mamdouh, 2018).

As a result, these revolutions did not bring about the establishment of freedom, nor did they offer a real alternation of political power. Consequently, those analysts stated that the inescapable condition for the success of such revolutions required the availability of social and political alternatives to replace existed political regimes. These alternatives were missing within the political, social or intellectual currents in the Arab World, wherein the political adolescence that characterized most of the parties or movements that came to power after the revolutions led to more severe tyranny. Moreover, these analysts held that the Arab revolutions failed in transforming popular protest into constitutional systems that establish freedom even though some of these revolutions succeeded in avoiding the descent into civil war, such as the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Worse still, there were other Arab countries who failed to preserve political unity, wherein revolutions led to bloody civil war as seen in Libya, Syria and Yemen. Thus, many analysts contended that until social and political alternatives mature and succeed in breaking free from the heavy-handed experience of political past – and the Arab citizen develops a will for political change - it seems that the Arab world will remain captive to existing authoritarian political structures. Therefore, these analysts concurred with Arendt's reading of revolutions, concluding that the Arab Spring experiences cannot be considered revolutions because they failed to bring about constitutional change (Mamdouh, 2018). In contrast, other scholars considered such conclusions hasty and misguided. Under the title of "*There is no future for dictatorships in the Arab World*" the scholar Emad al-Ali stated that the Arab man witnessed rebirth and transformation in his political thought following the revolutions of 2011 (al-Ali, 2019). Hence, these revolutions achieved a great success and brought about a change in the political condition, which prompted ruling elites in the Arab world to interact with people according to this new change. Building on Arendt's concept of action, al-Ali contended that previous abolition of political freedom which lasted for long decades resulted in diminishing entire social and political consciousness of Arab public. From this perspective, al-Ali stated that the abolition of political freedom in the Arab World emptied politics from its essence which led to diminution of independent and voluntary political participation. All the while, power structures continued to oppress and constrain the freedom of thought and action of the Arab peoples (al-Ali, 2019).

Moreover, social problems such as corruption, poverty, unemployment, the abuse of power and social injustice swept all aspects of the daily lives of Arab people. Consequently, these political and socio-economic problems prompted these revolutions and pushed the Arab people to revolt in face of authoritarian governments. Although such governments hastened to suppress the revolts, the political activity of revolutionary activists continued through social networks and political fora, as well as in comments on certain topics across social media, provoking lively discussions about political, socio-economic and cultural issues. Therefore, al-Ali concluded that these revolutions sent a signal to ruling elites that responsible political action is inevitable, noting that political and socio-economic reforms must consider the interests of Arab citizens, and that mechanisms of control previously deployed proved inappropriate in an era of globalization and technological developments (al-Ali, 2019). In the same vein, Ari-Elmeri Hyvonen concluded that the spring revolutions offered opportunities for Arab youth freedom of assembly and activity in the public realm. For him, such assembly enabled revolutionaries to challenge structural coercion and to resist capitalist temptations, as well as to discuss issues of public concern such democracy, human rights and social solidarity, making possible the beginning of something new (Hyvonen, 2016). Commenting on the tragedy of failed revolution in Egypt, Hyvonen quoted Arendt's remarks on the Hungarian Revolution when she said "This

revolution was a true event whose stature will not depend upon victory or defeat, *and* its greatness is secure in the tragedy it enacted (Hyvonene, 2016).

To large extent, ideas of freedom and revolution articulated by Arendt provide an analytical tool for understanding the events of the spring revolutions in the Arab World. Yet, the employment and utilization of such concepts require further exploration when applying them to the Arab World. In some ways this stems from tensions in Arendt's thought, but in others, it is a consequence of empirical application. For example, Arendt - at some points - valorised labourers as a significant element for launching mass revolutionary actions, while at other points, shows a degree of contempt for these labourers after the rise of totalitarian regimes, knowing that these regimes relied on these labourers on road to freedom (Canovan, 1978). Similarly, the same concerns remain ubiquitous regarding the Arab revolutions that would lead to emergence of extreme groups and the return of tyranny (Mahmood, 2018). In addition, Arendt drew a sharp distinction between private (social) and public (political) realms, while ignoring the impact of private concerns on public awareness and vice versa (d'Entreves, 2019). Indeed, this is very imminent in the Arab World, wherein tradition plays major role in determining choices of people. It remains to be seen to what extent Arendt social theory on revolutions provides comprehensive analysis on the Arab Spring uprisings, yet there is little doubt that her work helps to understand the broader dynamics at play in the political realm.

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Pierre Bourdieu

Toby Dodge

An increasing number of academics seeking to understand the complexities of the contemporary Middle East are reaching for Pierre Bourdieu's sociological approach, primarily his intellectually interdependent concepts of field, capital, habitus and symbolic violence. Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' offer a flexible approach, allowing analysts to factor in both the ideational and material causalities behind the events they are seeking to understand. Bourdieu described his own working method as 'constructivist structuralism' and his approach certainly focuses on causative structures beyond the consciousness of agents, arguing that an individual's perceptions have a 'social genesis'. However, he also wanted to reintroduce the role of agency that structuralism sought to abolish and make people's actions more than mere obedience to rule.

Bourdieu's attempt to balance individual agency with structural causality owes its origins to the milieu within which he developed as an intellectual. Bourdieu was born in 1930 and grew up in south-west France, arriving as a student in Paris as an outsider in terms of both class and geography. The Paris in which he became an academic was dominated by the structuralism of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the increasing influence of Bourdieu's intellectual contemporary, the Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser. Initially, in his early anthropology focused on the Kabyle in 1950s Algeria, Bourdieu followed this structural trend, developing the concept of habitus to challenge the free choice at the centre Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism. However, as his work evolved, he sought to balance structuralism with discussions of improvisation and strategy. In addition, throughout his intellectual life, Bourdieu shaped his work through a detailed dialogue with classical sociologists, including Marx, Weber and Durkheim.

Key argument

At the core of Bourdieu's working method are four key concepts, habitus, field, various forms of capital and the central notions of symbolic power and symbolic violence. An individual's habitus sits at the centre of Bourdieu's social theory and his understanding of agency. One's habitus is the cumulative sum of a person's socialisation, from the child growing up in the family to the changing socialisation individuals are constantly subjected to in society. Its influence on both cognition and physical action is subconscious, with an individual's habitus being the target of on-going struggles within society to shape perception, action and obtain dominance.

For Bourdieu, every society transformed by modernity becomes divided into a number of specific arenas for competition, which Bourdieu labels fields. These fields, although interrelated, or 'homologous', are differentiated from each other. The boundaries of a field and the values to be fought over within it are set by the competitors and the struggles they are involved in.

Those fighting with each other for dominance within fields seek to accumulate and deploy capital to win their struggle. Although there are many types of capital, four tend to predominate in Bourdieu's work. The first and most obvious is economic capital: money and property rights. The second is

social capital. This is gained through social networks and obligations, the ability to organise and mobilise, the benefits that come from group membership. The third type is cultural capital. This can be objectified in material objects like paintings, books and furniture but it can also be institutionalised in educational qualifications or embodied in an individual's bearing, her language capabilities or scholarly or religious learning. Finally, and central to his work, Bourdieu identifies symbolic capital as the most important capital and symbolic violence as the use of that capital to shape perceptions and order society. In seeking to explain how one group within a field seeks to dominate another, Bourdieu deliberately avoided using the term ideology. His understanding of the power of ideas was much wider, encompassing how cognition, communication, social organisation and domination are all shaped by symbolic power. Bourdieu is clear that the struggle to gain a monopoly over symbolic violence, the power to impose a vision of what the social world is and have this definition seen as legitimate, is as important as the Weberian notion of the monopoly over physical violence.

The struggle to gain symbolic power, to impose symbolic violence, is the competition to structure the common sense operating in any given field and across society as a whole. For Bourdieu, common sense is structured around the process of classification, the division and ordering of the social world through the imposition of categories and their naming. This is how agents gain their perception of the social world that they live in and are allocated the groups they become members of and hence their identities. Symbolic violence draws distinctions and establishes hierarchies between different groups, removing empirical fluidity. So, the struggle for symbolic power across the Middle East, is the struggle to impose classifications of how the social world should be understood, what social categories, for example Arab, Kurd, Sunni or Shi'a, should dominate common sense and be seen as legitimate.

A central focus of Bourdieu's work is the political field, its relationship with other fields and the state. The political field, like all fields, is an arena in which people and groups amass symbolic capital in the competition to impose their own vision as the dominant common sense. However, struggles within the political field, conducted by politicians, journalists and assorted 'experts', have a larger aim beyond the field itself, to define what the social world is in its totality. Bourdieu labels these competing definitions of the social, 'principles of vision and division'. These, in the hands of competing politicians, start off as 'speculative ideas' only to harden into powerful positions through their ability to be adopted by and hence mobilise people. The political field has a powerful role within any society, a role of censorship, of 'limiting the universe of political discourse', of placing boundaries on what is politically thinkable.

Bourdieu's view of the state and the role of the political and bureaucratic fields within it has two different aspects. Bourdieu's first and most important understanding of the state is disaggregated, an 'ensemble of fields that are the site of struggles'. The struggle in the political field to propagate a dominant 'principle of vision and division' would be joined by struggles within different fields that make up the state; administrative, bureaucratic and coercive and fields outside the state, like the religious field. Secondly, Bourdieu also perceived of that state in its totality, as the 'central bank of symbolic capital', an institution of immense potential power that through its deployment of informational and symbolic capital '... inculcates common forms and categories of perception and appreciation, social frameworks of perceptions, of understanding or of memory, in short state forms of classification'.

Bourdieu applied to the Middle East

Sami Zubaida was one of the first academics studying the Middle East to deploy Bourdieu's definition of the political field and his understanding of the state. Zubaida used this approach to understand the 'weak' and 'external' nature of the post-colonial state in the region and how 'communalist sentiments' entered into but were then transformed in the political field. Hazem Kandil has also successfully deployed a Bourdieusian approach to explain the different trajectories of three 'revolutions from above' carried out by modernising army officers in Iran, Egypt and Turkey. Kandil deploys Bourdieu's concept of the field of power, doxa and habitus to disaggregate the state and explain the different motivations of the politicians, army officers and bureaucrats struggling for power in the three different states and why different groups prevailed in different cases. Baczko, Dorronsoro and Quesnay also use Bourdieu's understanding of the changing value of different capitals and the struggle within semi-autonomous fields to understand the transformation of Syrian society as the state's power collapsed and the country descended into civil war after 2011. Finally, Dodge combines Bourdieu's concept of the political field with his understanding of capitals to examine the rise of sectarian identities in Iraq's after regime change in 2003 and, writing with Renad Mansour, how these sectarian identities were challenged by the mass social movement of 2019.

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Jacques Lacan

Emanuelle Degli Esposito

As a region defined through its historical relationship with colonialism, where national and state borders represent nothing more than lines in the sand – both literally and figuratively – political life in the Middle East has been characterised by scholars as precarious, unstable, and subject to the variable fluctuations of political and social upheavals. Questions of identity, in particular – whether that be attempts to differentiate individuals along tribal, ethnic, religious, or political lines, the (re)emergence of ethno-religious and sectarian conflict, or the manipulation of regional and local identity by political elites – underpin the fabric of social life in the region. For this reason, bringing a critical conceptual apparatus to bear on the creation, sustenance, and politicisation of identity is crucial in order to develop a thoughtful understanding of political life in the Middle East. While traditional scholarship on identity in the region has tended to fall within three broad schools of thought – primordialist, rationalist, and constructivist – none of the theories parse a distinction between identities and the self, as borrowed from the literature on psychology. As a result, there has been a proliferation of studies on identity politics in the Middle East that fall into the trap of equating individuals and/or states with the identities they profess, therefore flattening the terms of the debate. Here, I introduce the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and map out the ways in which the Lacanian distinction between the individual and the subject can provide a useful toolkit to theorising the dynamics of identity in the Middle East.

Identity and the subject of discourse: An overview of Lacanian theory

For Lacan, the world is structured according to three realms: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic (Lacan, 1958, 2004, 2006; Frosh, 2012; Laclau, 1990; Stavrakakis, 1999; Žižek, 1999, 2006). On a psychic level, the self exists in a pre-social state as raw, unmediated desire, unbounded by the logic of social order – this is the realm of the Real, the excess that escapes the constraints of the other two orders and defies explanation or understanding. However, since the Real is always in a position of excess and can never be fully expressed (because expression itself requires language, which is socially constructed), it is in the Imaginary and Symbolic orders that the desire of the individual comes to be articulated. In this way, Lacanian theory is predicated on a conceptual distinction between the pre-social, unmediated self (or individual) and the (socially-constructed) subject as expressed through the projection of certain images of subjective identity within the Imaginary realm on the one hand, and through the discursive articulation of social and political identity within the Symbolic realm on the other (Lacan, 2002, 2006). In Lacanian theory, then, the Symbolic order is the ensemble of signs and practices that make up the social order, and is structured according to the logic of language – in other words, the Symbolic is akin to the concept of the discursive discussed above. In order to become recognised as a social being, the self must submit their pre-social desires and drives to the social logic of Symbolic order via the medium of language (Lacan, 2002). Only by aligning themselves with particular discursive subject positions can individuals gain meaning as social subjects. In this way, language and discourse come to determine both what individuals can say and the potential ways they have of speaking about the social world and their place within it. (Soler, 2014)

This brief outline of Lacanian theory helps to illuminate the way in which the cohesive pre-social self-positing by both realist and constructivist theories of identity is marked as problematic from the start. Indeed, “psychoanalysis is founded on the rejection of traditional individualist conceptualisations of the subject” (Stavrakakis, 2008). According to Lacan, there is simply no recognisable self that exists prior to or outside of the Symbolic realm; rather, what exists is an ensemble of unmediated desires that are given form and substance through submission to the discursive logic of the Symbolic order through identification with the subject. In this sense, “the ego, the reflexive ‘I’ (the Cartesian subject) is a fantasy. It does not exist as a cohesive entity” (Ewing, 1997). Rather, the self can only gain meaningful existence through identification with the subject by articulating itself as an “I” or a “me” within the discursive Symbolic order (Epstein, 2010; Laclau, 1994). This framework takes seriously the discursive construction of social reality while refusing to fall into the poststructuralist trap of reducing individuals to mere products of discourse – instead, there is an active and agential process of identification that is required in order for the individual to enter the Symbolic realm that is nonetheless constrained by the discursive contours operating within the particular context in which that identification is made. Within a Lacanian framework, therefore, we move from an essentialist to a processual understanding of identity (Guillaume, 2007; Lloyd, 2005) where “identity” does not refer to some property or facet of the self but rather to an active practice of identification with the subject of discourse.

However, because this Symbolic order is socially constructed and never of the individual’s own making – and thus “other” – the individual is necessarily alienated in entering it since it can never fully encompass the entirety of their interior psychic life (Frosh, 2010; Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008; Hook and Neill, 2008; Lacan, 2004, 2006; Laclau, 1994). This is the key to the Lacanian notion of the “lacking subject”. Since every discursive realm is defined and constrained by what lies outside it – its constitutive other – and is thus never complete in and of itself, all discursive systems (including that of the Symbolic order) are necessarily incomplete and lacking (Fink, 1995; Lacan, 2004; Laclau, 1990; Laclau and Mouffe, 2000; Žižek, 1999). What this means is that the discursive subject that forms the core of social identity is itself lacking. As Verhaeghe (1998: 175) lucidly puts it in relation to the notion of personal identity: “the very kernel of our personality is an empty space: peeling off layer after layer of identification in search of one’s personality, one ends up with a void, with the original lack.” For this reason, any attempt by the individual to identify with an identity category (understood as the subject of discourse) is therefore equally incomplete and lacking; and thus precipitates a constant re-articulation and re-iteration in a vain attempt to seek the impossible fullness of identity: “What we have then... is not identities but identifications, a series of failed identifications” (Stavrakakis, 2002).

In a Lacanian reading of subjectivity, then, the individual is trapped in an incorrigible bind; on the one hand, “one has to identify with something” (Laclau, 1994: 3; emphasis added), while on the other hand the subject with which the individual seeks to identify is exposed as hollow and lacking (Campbell, 1998; Doty, 2000; Epstein, 2008; Hansen, 2006; Smith, 2000; Zehfuss, 2001). For this reason, the process of identification is never complete and constantly in flux; perpetually shifting and reiterating itself in a doomed attempt to paper over the silences and cracks inherent in every discursive construction. Such an active and (re)iterative understanding of identity also takes seriously the differential and contingent nature of various discursive power structures across various times and contexts. Within this framework, then, the notion of any kind of coherent or stable identity emerges as a fantasy; in the words of Stuart Hall: identity “is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-

determination... There is always ‘too much’ or ‘too little’ – an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality” (Hall, 2000). This is where the Lacanian critique of ideology comes into force.

Lacan and the critique of ideology

Lacanian theory builds on the materialist concept of ideology developed by scholars such as Marx (Marx, 2010; Marx and Engels, 1972), Mannheim (Mannheim, 2013), and Althusser (Althusser, 1976, 2006) in which the consciousness of individuals is determined by the workings of the social world. Under such readings, ideology functions primarily as a “mental fiction” (Mannheim, 2013) produced by the ensemble of material practices and that works to maintain “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1976: 152–159). Lacan, and Lacanian-inspired theorists such as Laclau and Žižek, take this move one step further, exposing the way in which ideology functions not only to obscure the material workings of the social world but also to paper over the discursive instability inherent in any form of identity construction by binding individuals to specific iterations of the subject through the workings of fantasy.

For Lacan, ideology cannot simply be reduced to a rationalist preoccupation with “conscious, well-articulated systems of belief” (Eagleton, 2014); rather, ideological formations involve attempts to “fix” the instability of the Symbolic order by papering over the lack inherent in any discursive articulation. In other words, ideology can be understood to represent “the point where power impacts upon certain utterances and inscribes itself tacitly within them” (Eagleton, 2014). The way in which ideology performs this function is through the inscription of particular words and phrases that work to structure the meaning of a particular discourse (what Lacan calls points de capiton). These points de capiton often take the form of what Laclau and Mouffe call “empty signifiers”: terms such as “justice”, “equality”, “order”, etc. whose function it is to paper over the lack of social closure within any given discourse (Laclau, Mouffe, 2001). Of course, the way in which such empty signifiers function are contextual and contingent – and are themselves dependent on the socially-constructed meanings of the discursive Symbolic order – and thus expose the way in which discursive power alignments shift and rearrange themselves over time and across contexts.

Žižek, in his application of Lacanian theory, takes this deconstruction of ideology one step further. For Žižek, the empty signifiers that work to “fix” or “quilt” discourse are themselves complicit in the Symbolic order, and take the form of particular norms that help to maintain the socio-political status quo (Žižek, 1989). These “master signifiers” do more than simply “fix” the meaning of particular discourses; they also work to structure the desire of the pre-social self by managing its entry into the socio-symbolic order. For Žižek, it is ideological fantasy that works to smooth over the inherent gaps in the system of signification by shaping the articulation of desire:

Fantasy thus animates and manages desire; it teaches us how to desire. But just as fantasy can never live up to its promises (because no fullness exists), so desire is never satiated; it is condemned to repetition and failure in search of the missing object. (Kapoor, 2014)

In this sense, while the pre-social self desires the fullness of identity promised through identification with the subject of discourse, this desire can never be entirely fulfilled since the subject itself is lacking (as discussed above). It is this fundamental failure that lies at the heart of the power of ideology; ideology works to bind the self to (various iterations of) the subject by promoting the fantasy that its desires can and will be fulfilled – but the very impossibility of this fulfilment is what leads to a sense of dissatisfaction and thus requires a perpetual process of (re)identification with the

subject in the first place. The pre-social self is thus trapped in a never-ending cycle of desire and alienation, in which it is “sold” the lie of the fullness of identity – a fullness it desperately desires. Ideology thus works to paper over the fundamental lack at the heart of subjective identity by promoting the fantasy of “identity”.

Reading Lacan in the Middle East: Applications and potential pitfalls

The above is a necessarily brief overview of some of the key elements of Lacanian theory. I have shown that one of the key contributions of Lacanian discourse analysis is to allow for a conceptual distinction to be made between individuals (the self) and identities (the subject of discourse), without reducing the former to the latter. In practice, this means that claims can be made about political and social subjects in the Middle East without requiring that these claims also apply to diverse individuals under study. For example, it would be possible to interrogate the forms of sectarian subjectivities engendered by political regimes in countries such as Syria or Iraq, without suggesting that Syrians or Iraqis themselves are necessarily sectarian (Degli Esposti, 2018). Similarly, the Lacanian foregrounding of antagonism and alienation produced by the lacking subject throws into sharp relief the contingent nature of individual and collective practices of identification and calls into question the discursive underpinnings and ideological fantasies that underpin subjectivity (Eastwood, 2017, 2018). A Lacanian lens thus allows us primarily to view all social identities as products of contingent and antagonistic discursive power (and therefore political by definition) and therefore to study the workings of such identities through a methodological focus on the articulatory practices of identification. Methodologically, this means that we are able to study the political life of the Middle East through a focus on different identity discourses, whether they be expressed by states, groups, elites, or individuals (Epstein, 2008; Stavrakakis, 2005; Stavrakakis, 2003; Wilson, 2014)

Finally, adopting a Lacanian-inspired approach to ideological fantasy exposes the extent to which the attempt to construct cohesive or coherent social and political identities in the Middle East are fundamentally lacking, and predicated on a desire for the (impossible) fullness of identification. In this sense, the focus of analysis becomes the ways in which socio-symbolic discourses structure the forms of subjectivity available to individuals, and avoids investing too much analytical weight in any given identity discourse. This allows us, on the one hand, to maintain conceptual distance from individuals and the identities they may (or may not) identify with, as well as taking these identities seriously as socio-symbolic products in and of themselves. Further, by emphasising the role ideology in the formation of political identity it is possible to foreground the role of fantasy and desire, thus providing a theoretical framework for understanding what makes these identities ‘stick’.

While adopting a Lacanian lens can thus prove a useful analytical tool when it comes to understanding political and social identities in the Middle East, there nevertheless remain some potential pitfalls when it comes to applying Lacanian theory to the study of identity politics. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, is the fact that Lacan’s writings themselves are often dense, obscure, and difficult to penetrate. As a result, much of the academic literature that draws on Lacanian theory relies on secondary readings or applications of his thought; most notably, Slavoj Žižek and Ernesto Laclau (Laclau, Mouffe, 2001; Žižek, 1989, 2000). While this is not a problem in and of itself, it does mean that studies using Lacanian theory are often several levels removed from Lacan’s thought itself, and constitute more of a reimagining or reinterpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis, rather than a pure application. A related pitfall is that since Lacan continued to write, speak, and conduct clinical observations for the best part of four decades, his oeuvre can seem somewhat incoherent and

sometimes even self-contradictory. Coupled with the fact that many Lacanian-inspired scholars sought to imitate Lacan's own writing style, resulting in what Yannis Stavrakakis has called "an obscurantist antisystematic tradition in Lacanian literature" (Stavrakakis, 2002: 6). While this may leave Lacanian theory open to the criticism that it is imprecise or impenetrable, it also allows scholars the conceptual room to bring their own experiences and imaginations to bear on the insights offered by Lacan. In this sense, Lacanian theory is best used as a point of inspiration or departure, rather than a perfect model for studying human behaviour.

Finally, as a psychoanalyst interested in the interiority of human experience, Lacan himself never explicitly offered any kind of analytical framework for the study of political life or political identity. In this sense, any application of Lacan to the identity politics of the Middle East necessarily represents a point of departure from strict adherence to Lacanian thought. Nevertheless, as I hope I have shown above, the Lacanian understanding of the distinction between the individual and the subject, and the workings of ideological fantasy, offer productive starting places for understanding the significance, power, and machinations of political identity in the Middle East and beyond.

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Henri Lefebvre

Deen Sharp

Henri Lefebvre has transformed how we understand the spatial transformations that capitalism entails, namely its production of urban space, and the everyday struggles to transform it. Lefebvre was prolific, publishing over seventy books in his lifetime. His writings are often closer to streams of consciousness than formal academic texts. This can also make his work somewhat impenetrable, contradictory, and rambling. As the Lefebvrian Andy Merrifield notes, Lefebvre “wrote every book as if it was his last: feverously, rapidly - perhaps, on occasion, too rapidly.” (Merrifield, 2006) But this should not detract from his importance as a scholar, who has changed the way we think about space and spatial practice. Lefebvre has also made notable contributions to the thought of foundational western philosophers, such as Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger.

Intellectual Context

Born in 1901, Lefebvre experienced most of the 20th century first hand. He worked as a taxi driver, broadcasted on radio, taught philosophy and sociology at numerous universities and high schools, was a member of the French Communist Party until his exclusion in 1958, and committed anti-Stalinist who fought against racism for the Resistance movement. (Merrifield, 2006) His lived experience was central to his vast written theoretical and politically engaged work. He died aged 90 in June 1991, but his work grows more prescient by the day.

Lefebvre’s influence has been particularly strong amongst urbanists: geography, urban studies, planning and architecture. But Lefebvre’s contributions span the disciplines. Stuart Elden insists that Lefebvre thought should be “conceptualized as a whole”; the need to understand Lefebvre not only as a spatial theorist but also as a political theorist and philosopher (Elden, 2004) Indeed, Lefebvre has made foundational contributions to Marxist thought. He, along with Norbert Guterman and others, founded *La revue marxiste*, one of the first Marxist journals in France (ibid). Among his published books, five are on the writings of Marx, Hegel, and Lenin, and he made notable contributions to the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger (ibid).

The legacy of Lefebvre’s writings is mixed. His vast production of texts, some of which was poorly written, has meant that his work has too often been dismissed. It was only until the year of his death and the following the translation of *The Production of Space*, that Lefebvre started to be read extensively in Anglo-American academia (concurrently he was also “reborn” in France). Since the early 1990s, a steady stream of English translations of Lefebvre’s writings on everyday life, modernity, the city, urbanization, rhythm analysis have appeared, as well as several scholarly guides and introductions to Lefebvre’s at times impenetrable writings (see below “further readings”).

A key insight that Lefebvre put forward through his idea the “production of space” is that space does not exist in itself, it is produced: (social) space is a (social) product. Two Lefebvrian ideas have come to the fore that I detail below, and both relate to this key insight that space is a social product. The first, is the idea of planetary urbanization. This is an analysis of the production of space through capitalism, which is characterised by urban space. The idea of planetary urbanization views the

production of the urban context from above and on a global scale. The second, is the concept of the “right to the city” that Lefebvre describes as a “call and demand”. This idea takes us to the level of street, and the production of space through the politics of encounter and everyday social relations.

Key Argument

“Society has been completely urbanized” Lefebvre (2003 [1970]) wrote, “This hypothesis implies a definition: An urban society is a society that results from a process of complete urbanization. This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future.” (Lefebvre, 1970) In the 1960s the world was not majority urban. Over the past fifty-years the prescience of Lefebvre’s thesis of the complete urbanization of the planet has grown increasingly more powerful.

Urban studies scholars, such as Neil Brenner, Christian Schmid and Andy Merrifield, have ensured that Lefebvre’s theory of planetary urbanization has lived on, built upon, and utilized to analyse the extended urbanization of the planet.

Lefebvre through planetary urbanization allows us to “see” the urban in a radically different way to normative approaches. He argues that the processes of urbanization under modern capitalism cannot be reduced to the sociospatial entities that are conventionally labelled as “cities”. Instead, Lefebvre refers to the urban fabric to illuminate the dominance of the city over the countryside and to the explosive growth of capitalist industrial urbanization. The scholarship that has built on Lefebvre’s idea of planetary urbanization has been at the centre of an intense contemporary debate within urban studies. Many of the critics of planetary urbanization have argued that this thesis ignores everyday life and urban struggle. I will not go into this acrimonious debate here. I will stress that everyday life was central to Lefebvre’s thinking and foundational to his other key contribution that I take up in this paper, “the right to the city”.

Lefebvre developed a distinct “heterodox” (or messy) Marxism. Through a blend of Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger, Lefebvre established an intellectual framework that emphasized everyday life and resisted linear narratives. He stressed instead rhythms, repetition, cycles, and moments. Elden writes that: “The notion of everyday life provides an indispensable context for the work on urban and rural sociology, the analysis of time and space, and...the question of the state.” (Elden, 2004) For Lefebvre it was through an analysis of everyday life that we could understand the capitalist mode of production (that he proclaimed had colonized it). In true Marxist form, for Lefebvre the object of study is everyday life but the objective of this analysis is to transform it.

A key concept that Lefebvre put forward and that has resonated not only with academics across the world, including in the Middle East, but with activists and even policy makers, is the *right to the city*. Indeed, the “right to the city” has become so prolific in urbanist circles that some dismiss it as merely a catchphrase. Lefebvre’s right to the city - a “cry and demand” - has profound implications for ideas around citizenship, as well as claiming rights and appropriating social and physical spaces of the city.

Through the concept of the right to the city, Lefebvre was reacting against overt functionalism and modernist urban planning that was eroding the chaotic heterogeneity, cosmopolitanism and vibrant street life of the historic city and replacing it with dispersed, functionally disaggregated, and politico-economically administered forms of urban life (Kipfer, et al, 2013). The right to the city was not about restoring historical forms of the city, Kipfer et alia argue, but asserting revolutionary

perspectives on urban society that emerge out of struggles in social spaces where the ‘city’ may never have existed: modernist company towns, factories, and high rises (ibid). For Lefebvre the right to the city represents the right to participate in society through everyday practices (e.g. work, housing, education, leisure). These rights are not granted by the state (from above) but rather to be established through political action and social relations.

Notably, the right to the city in Lefebvre’s framing doubles as the right to difference (ibid) Capitalist urbanization in its destruction of the historic city, Lefebvre contended, eradicated difference. Revolutionary space must assert itself against the force of homogeneity, this is what Lefebvre sought through the right to difference. As Gilbert and Dikec note, Lefebvre first conceived the notion of the right to the city to legitimate “the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organization.” (Gilbert, Dikec, 2008)

In Application

Despite the vastly differentiated socio-economic, political, and demographic contexts in the Middle East, the intensification and extension of urbanization has been a common feature. This has manifested itself in the spectacular rise of the Gulf city-states, such as Dubai and Doha. Mega-projects have sprung up across the region from Morocco to Iraq. In Saudi Arabia the government has launched urban projects on such a scale that they call them “giga-projects”, that are “designed to create new ecosystems and unlock new sectors.” (Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund) Saudi is currently building or proposing six different giga-projects, including the \$500 billion “NEOM mega-city of the future”. But rapid urbanization has also been experienced outside the oil rich Gulf states. In Egypt, for instance, President Sisi following the 2013 coup announced a range of infrastructure and urban mega-projects, including a new capital city.

Lefebvre provides the tools through such conceptual frameworks as planetary urbanization to comprehend this extensive and extended urbanization across the Middle East. It is through his work we can understand how and why the real estate industry underpins so many of the region’s economies. How and why, there has been a region wide shift from the rural to the processes of urbanization, and the associated explosion of shopping malls, gated communities, and golf courses.

But it is important not to lose sight of how this urbanization has impacted the inhabitants of the region themselves and this is where Lefebvre’s “right to the city” is critical. The concept and slogan of the “right to the city” has been taken up by scholars, housing activists, policy makers and governments (in Mexico the government passed the right to the city charter). The influence of the ideas and framing of the “right to the city” has also been felt in the Middle East. The right to the city framework has been utilized by scholars across the region (see suggested reading below), and has directly influenced activist groups, such as the municipal campaign group Beirut My City (Beirut Madinati) in Lebanon, and Tadamon in Egypt.

Issues to be aware of

Lefebvre can change the way you think about our contemporary urban world but you need to approach his work with care, persistence and your own intellectual rigour. Lefebvre can be difficult to read, so do utilize the many guides that have been written by scholars from various disciplines to navigate his work (see below). Lefebvre is often guilty of misquoting, misattributing or not quoting at

all. But the liberty Lefebvre took in his writing produced some startling insights just two of which I have outlined here. Lefebvre will open new horizons but proceed with caution and care.

Suggested readings

Stuart Elden has produced a helpful guide to not only where and how to start engaging with Lefebvre's own writings but also the numerous introductions and analysis produced by others on Lefebvre's work (Elden). There have been several scholars that have taken up the idea of the right to the city in the Middle East¹⁶. Unlike the right to the city, Lefebvre's thesis of planetary urbanization, and the most recent scholarship that has built on this work, has had a lukewarm reception from Middle East urban studies scholars (Azam, Haas, 2018) There is much more work to be done in thinking through the planetary urbanization thesis and its implications for the Middle East.

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Loïc Wacquant

Staci Strobl

As an interdisciplinary sociologist, Loïc Wacquant fuses two approaches: the material, associated with Marxist thought, and the symbolic as developed by Pierre Bourdieu, to produce a novel and highly relevant social theory. Broadly speaking, Wacquant contributes to the literature on racial capitalism which identifies links between social inequality, capitalist development, punishment, and political symbolics.

Wacquant recognizes race and poverty as complex, mapped onto neighborhood identities, and overlapping with gender (among other group identities) to form spatialized hierarchies and the construction of an “underclass.” His notions of race and class may be broadened to apply to other social differences, given that other identity markers may be more analytically relevant in other times and spaces.

Wacquant emerged within the *fin de siècle* debate on neoliberal capitalism-- a political process (not merely an economic one) involving the dismantling of the welfare state, the opening of free trade and investment, privatization, deregulation, and austerity. He finds that neoliberalism represents a novel and new form of capitalism exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Jamie Peck, for instance, reads Wacquant’s theory as necessarily requiring “...neoliberalism as the ‘root cause’...” of social difference, while others allow for application into other types of capitalism; broadly speaking, the applications of his theory rests in critiques of capitalism with social symbolic meaning.

Key arguments

Wacquant implicates nation-states in perpetrating structural inequalities which reinforce and reproduce those symbolic markers for their political and economic benefit. His initial research involved the African-American experience in urban ghettos in the U.S, first through the micro lens of a boxing gym in Chicago, and then in a macro way in subsequent books, ay focusing on the racialization of capitalism and the disproportionate punishing of poor minorities in the U.S. and France. He identified a “closed circuit” from ghetto to prison as a means not just of regulating labor, as prior sociologists put forth, but as a means of extracting it through such programs as convict leasing. Wacquant most famous work uses in-depth descriptions of ethnoracial domination, labor extraction, and the penal state in the U.S. to highlight the role of the state in producing and maintaining social and economic marginalities. Racial underclasses are marked by economic difference and social difference, operating in a self-reinforcing loop.

Wacquant’s most enduring concept will likely be that of *territorial stigmatization*. Through his work on the racialized ghettos in the United States and the class and ethnically marginalized *banlieux* in France, he posits that “...poverty politics are not only directed toward deprived and marginal groups, but also toward deprived and marginal *territories*.” In “The New Peculiar Institution” and later in *Punishing the Poor*, Wacquant connects American slavery-- and its Jim Crow legacies of segregation, lynching, and continued labor extraction of black Americans-- to the advent and persistence of the black ghetto in the urban United States. He describes the ghetto as a mechanism of social spatiality that enables a dominant class to benefit from a marginalized group materially and

socially. For Wacquant, there is a social prison in the ghetto and a juridical ghetto in the prison. By this he means that there is the ever-presence of metaphorical walls and over-policing in the ghetto, and the ghetto is reconstituted behind the walls of penal institutions and through the stigmatization of punishment.

For Wacquant, the social space of the ghetto has four main characteristics: stigma, constraint, confinement, and institutional encasement.

Stigma. The salient difference of people in a ghetto is exaggerated and constructed as hostile to a dominant people and to the state. The population is stripped of their full humanity and negative social capital adheres to entire communities by association and shared identity (symbolically) and materially as well.

Constraint. A dishonored group's life opportunities are minimized, sacrificed to the monopolization of social and material goods by the honorable and dominant status group. This "... turn(s) the [population] into a sacrificial category which concentrates within itself all the negative properties (immorality, poverty, [ethnoracial difference]) that [the dominant] community wishes to expel outside itself."

Confinement. Here he points to the ghettos of early modern Europe, which were not just confined by high walls, but were also made confining by continual surveillance by authorities, the modern-day equivalent of being over-policed and over-incarcerated in African-American ghettos.

Encasement. The ghetto is a "social prison" encasing the population by real or metaphorical barriers, separate from the places where the dominant status group lives their lives.

Wacquant also characterizes ghetto spaces as "Janus-faced" being both places of stigma and destitution as well as economic improvement and social unification for those living therein. Here the possibility of agency can be found as adaptive subcultures of survival and resistance form. Wacquant also sees two faces in the neoliberal regime itself, as governments care for and enable the social and economic elites, but are authoritarian toward others more precariously situated. The latter are targeted not just for disciplinary action, but moralistic campaigns, and being socially-engineered toward low wage labor. In extreme cases such as in the U.S., Wacquant points to a "(hyper)ghetto" for "(sub)proletarian blacks" when special diligence and penal severity can be found in a "city within a city."

As a student of Pierre Bourdieu, Wacquant extolled deep engagement in case studies, employing many of the techniques of historical sociology in his work, such as a *long durée* approach of historical contextualizing, archival studies, in-depth interviewing, cases studies, and most importantly, ethnography. Bourdieu's insistence on relating to what ordinary people do, think, and feel in a particular milieu resonates strongly in Wacquant's work.

In application to the MENA region, including its limitations

It is important to note that shoe-horning the American or French experiences onto MENA societies would be contrary to the spirit of Wacquant's commitment to local engagement, ethnographic fieldwork, and the *long durée*. Because Wacquant drew extensively on historical sociology in looking at the U.S. and France, researchers applying Wacquant in other domains should engage deeply in the

region, country, or community when applying his theory. For example, Wacquant's territorial stigmatization provides an analytical tool for scholars looking at the Occupied Territories in Palestine, expatriate labor camps in the Arabian Gulf, and displaced peoples' camps in Syria and Iraq, among many other examples.

Of note, Bourdieu and Wacquant explored post-colonial Algerian society, analyzing the writings of sociologist Abdelmayak Sayad, a migrant from the Kabylia region in Algeria to France. As an academic and reflexive account of immigration and human intransience, Bourdieu and Wacquant concur with key principles of Sayad's, for instance, that an immigrant is an emigrant first. Scholars should "...start from the sending communities, their history, structure and contradictions. Like Sayad, Bourdieu and Wacquant theorize overall that migrants are social hybrids often with no legitimate place to be calling into question notions of citizenship, state and nation.

Bruce Hall in "Reading race in Africa and the Middle East" confronts the problem of conceptualizing race in varied societies and recognizes that it may be socially relevant to greater and lesser extents in certain times and places. By focusing on Wacquant's notion of the distinction between folk and analytical versions of race, scholars can begin to apply his theory in a sophisticated way to non-Western spaces. In other words, how does the category of race or other social difference operate among ordinary people and how can that folk notion be connected to the analytical category so that it is more empirically grounded? In the Middle East in particular, the salient difference between a hegemonic power, such as the dominant state identity, and a marginalized group may not be race, but rather religion, sect, or indigeneity, among other possibilities.

Additionally, the role that neoliberalism plays in MENA societies differs from the Western societies Wacquant studied. Critics of Wacquant have pointed to the ambiguity of the term neoliberalism, and this is even more the case for non-Western milieux (that a society may still have a welfare state or never had one to begin with, for example). MENA nation-states are imperial artifacts, carved out for resource extraction, subject to colonial rule, and in the process, subjugated, reconstituted, and scarred. Scholars should turn to post-colonial theorists to illuminate unique processes of industrialization, labor extraction, decolonization, nationalization, political independence, and foreign investment, and these historical antecedents would need to be described specifically. For example, the Arabian Gulf countries have been referred to as "rentier states"—whether this is accurate is beyond the scope of this article-- but as such, this points to a consideration of the way neoliberalism manifests, or more broadly how the particular state or community is incorporated into global capitalist systems.

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Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi

Ola Rifai

In May 2002, dozens of Arab scholars met in the French Institution of Aleppo to commemorate the 100th death anniversary of Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1855-1902). During a two-day workshop, organized by al-Kawakibi's great-grandson, scholars addressed issues of Islamic and socio-economic reforms, identity, and the quest for 'self-revival'. Yet as, Mahir al-sharif, one of the speakers concluded, this seemed "ineffective [...] mainly because those intellectuals who are detached from governmental and educational institutions do not have a broad social foundation supported by people" (Al-Kawakibi 2003).

Ten years later, the Arab awakening reached Aleppo within the context of the so-called Arab Spring. In May 2012, Aleppo city, the birthplace of al-Kawakibi was a battlefield for a bloody struggle for power between a variety of Islamist militias, revolutionary youths, and the regime troops. Each has different interpretations of reform, identity, and freedom. Apparently, 120 years on after the death of al-Kawakibi, Syrians are still puzzled over issues of freedom, identity, secularism, reform, and state-building. Paradigms that al-Kawakibi's works have tackled deeply. Hence, it is crucial to revisit some of al-Kawakibi scope of thought and employ it as an analytical toolkit for a further understanding of Syria and the Middle East today.

Intellectual context: The First Wave of *al-Nahda*

The main essence of Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi's political thought is rooted in the context of *al-Nahda* ('Arab Awakening' or 'Arab renaissance') in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The period was marked by the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the increasing influence of European power in the Middle East. Al-Kawakibi, alongside al-Nahda intellectuals such as Rifa'at al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), Mouhammad Abduh (1849-1905), Ibrahim al-Yaziji (1847-1906), Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), and Rashid Rida (1865-1935) were part of the stream that Albert Hourani termed 'Arabic thought in the liberal age' (Hourani, 1983). Despite encompassing different influences and ideologies, these figures played critical roles in conceptualizing complex issues of nationalism, secularism, religious affiliations, and socio-political reforms in the Arabic-speaking region. Hourani argues that al-Nahda intellectuals "who were set apart from those among whom they were living by education and experience, nevertheless, could express the need for their society, and to some extent at least their ideas served as forces in the process of change" (Ibid: vii). In this light, al-Kawakibi strives for the implementation of progressive change in society and dedicated his lifetime to analysing the causes of *Inhitat* (decay) in the Arab world. To this end, he carefully examined the nexuses between religion and politics, religion and despotism, and politics and society, concluding that the development of a reformist framework was necessary. Born to a prominent family in Aleppo, al-Kawakibi received a traditional education and introduced his ideas through articles in the newspapers that he established, *Al-Shahaba*, and *Al-i'tidal*. Although the audiences were limited due to the sophisticated language he used, al-Kawakibi succeeded in bridging gaps with people at the grass root level while working as a civil servant, where his activism against social injustice yielded him the nickname *abu al-Du'afa'* (the father of weak) (Chaikhouni, 2021).

The academic debate tends to ideologise and further categorises al-Kawakibi as a pan-Arabist, or pan-Islamist, or a secularist. Although these ideologies are manifested in al-Kawakibi's work, the paradigms he articulated cannot be limited to these three categories alone. Besides, academic literature neglects al-Kawakibi's reformist project toward state-building and his quest for a multidimensional evolution of society.

Main Argument: reform 'from within'

Al-Kawakibi introduced his hypotheses throughout two seminal works *Umm al-Qura* (The Mother of Villages-Mecca), and *Tabai al-Istibdad* (The Nature of Tyranny). Integral to his thinking is the steadfast opposition to Ottoman imperialism as he attempts to shift power to the Arabic-speaking world. Although there are some claims that he may have been influenced by Blunt and Alfieri's work (Hourani, 1983:271), this does not limit the originality of al-Kawakibi ideas "owing no doubt to his strong political interests and convictions" (Ibid).

In essence, al-Kawakibi strives to identify the causes behind the decline of the Arab Muslim *umma*. To this end, he looks at what al-Kawakibi labels as *al-da'a* (disease) and henceforth quests for *al-dawa'* (the remedy). *Umm al-Qura* is a fictional proceeding from the Conference of the Islamic Renaissance that was held among representatives of many parts of the Muslim world who gathered secretly in Mecca to discuss the decline of the Arab Muslim community. Although al-Kawakibi demands that the Centre of the Islamic Caliphate should move to Mecca as he aims to end the Turks' monopoly over religion and power, he does not advocate the establishment of a theocracy. Rather, al-Kawakibi's Caliphate is entirely spiritual. He uses the term *al-futoor al-'am* (general apathy) to describe the declining conditions of the Arab Muslim Community and depicts it as a fatal disease. Al-Kawakibi argues that the germ of this disease is 'religious ignorance'. He analytically outlines eighty-six (including primary and secondary) causes of *al-futoor al-'am* (al-Furati, 1932). He classifies three of them as general causes: religion, political, and moral causes.

Firstly, al-Kawakibi emphasises the tie between religious and political despotism and traces the main cause of the deterioration of Arab Muslim conditions to religion. For him, the abandonment of religious values and religious practice resulted in the corruption of religion as well as the instrumentalisation of religion for political ends (ibid). Nevertheless, al-Kawakibi stresses that the problem does not lie in Islam rather it exists in the political agenda of some Muslims who manipulate religion. In this light, he highlights the lack of religious education and the necessity of knowledge (ibid). Al-Kawakibi finds the second principal cause of *al-futoor al-'am* to be political and manifested in the state hegemony over resources and the political sphere as well as the absence of any type of 'freedom of expression'. In his words "freedom is the most precious thing for any human being, when freedom is absent, apathy will prevail" (ibid). He argues that the socio-economic injustice among different stratum of society has a fatal catalyst for nation building (ibid).

Al-Kawakibi notes that the third principal reason for decline lies in the deteriorating moral conditions for Arab Muslims and their "acquiescence in ignorance"(ibid). He concludes *umm al-Qura* by advocating a multidimensional reform project. At the core of it are three concepts: separation of religion and state, the significance of education, and the 'good governance' (ibid). Fundamentally, al-Kawakibi delineated a reform 'from within' project which aims to revive the Arab Muslim community and act as the main cure for the decline. He advocates a top to bottom form project and argues that there should be an interaction with the bottom-up discourse. According to him "the most

important remedy is the enlightenment of thought through education and the development of the yearning for progress among leaders of the rising generation" (ibid).

The second and more renowned book by al-Kawakibi is *Tabai al-Istibdad wamasari' al-Istibdad* (The Nature of Tyranny and the devastating results of oppression), in which he finds tyranny to be the origin of political and social decline in the Arab Muslim world. He conceptualises the political phenomenon of tyranny to be a 'devastating disease' and the remedy for it is *al-shura al-dasturiyaa* (the constitutional counsel). Interpretations of this book generated heated debate on nationalism, pan-Islamism, modernisation and even socialism in Arab literature.

Al-Kawakibi defines tyranny as the "absolute rule of an individual or a small group without concerns about any possible consequences" dictatorship, despotism authoritarianism or totalitarianism are synonyms for tyranny (al-Kawakibi, 2006). He articulates his theories regarding *istibdad* through seven chapters, after a short preface and a brief introduction, he looks at the causes of tyranny and illustrates the interrelations between oppression and religion, knowledge, honor, wealth, ethics, and progress. For him, despotism is a product of these matters.

Al-Kawakibi stresses that tyranny and religion have interdependent and complex relations and argues that political entrepreneurs manipulate religion for self-interests, in his words "every political tyrant adopts some sacred adjectives alongside God, or assumes a position related to God. Tyrants always surround themselves with clergymen supporters to help them suppress people in the name of God" (ibid). Nevertheless, al-Kawakibi assures that "freedom is the basis of Islam, as it lights away despotism [...] and demands justice" but "unfortunately, the religion lost its faithful supporters and Wisemen and fell prey to the tyrants" (ibid). A central theme of his discussion is that authoritarianism is embedded within the society and is demoralizing to all of society.

Al-Kawakibi concludes his book with a brief outline for 'remedying the disease' which lies in the social revival because according to him "before resisting tyranny, a replacement political plan should be prepared" and that "the only effective way to completely abolish tyranny is the progress of the nation [...] which can be accomplished by education and motivation" (ibid).

In application: The Evolution Rather than The Revolution

Although al-Kawakibi's fascinating contribution to the social theory is more than one century old, it is still relevant to today's Middle East and the new reality that the Arab Spring produced. Henceforth scholars working in the socio-political research on the Middle East should consider employing al-Kawakibi's thoughts as a critical tool to explore complex phenomena like democratization and desectarianisation.

Al-Kawakibi worked ceaselessly to illuminate the interdependency of religious and political authoritarianism which at this time has a powerful influence in countries like Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. More importantly, this interdependency has arguably thwarted the implementation of progressive change. However, looking through al-Kawakibi's lens, this can be tackled by a 'reform from within' and a multidimensional reformist project which engages socio-economic, cultural, religious, political, and religious concerns. Undoubtedly, the separation between religion and state in the Middle East today proves to be more challenging than in the 19th century, given the intra-Islamic conflicts, the various radical jihadist groups, and the military intervention of myriad state and non-state actors. Syria and Iraq are two cases experiencing all these factors. However, according to al-

Kawakibi's hypothesis, this can be addressed through a reformist approach toward state-building that is based on civic conceptions and the reconstruction of a multilayered civic identity. This would pave the way to transform religious authority into ritual affiliations.

The focal point of al-Kawakibi's work is self-revival in the Arabic-speaking world. The Arab Spring seems to test his hypothesis regarding *al-futoor al'am* as civil movements mushroomed and the social foundation for the intellectual realm expanded. More importantly, this is underpinned by an interaction between discourse from above and the one from below. The most recent cases are the Tishreen Revolution in Iraq and the 17 October Revolution in Lebanon, both of which challenged the structured interplay between religious and political authoritarianism. And both are considered as pacific resistance movements, sharing an essential element that al-Kawakibi's work highlight in the struggle against authoritarian regimes. Al-Kawakibi stresses that "tyranny cannot be resisted by force. it should be resisted by peaceful means in gradual steps" (al-Kawakibi, 2006). Yet this anti-militarist rhetoric poses limitation to his work and triggers criticism against al-Kawakibi's views accusing him to advocates utopian approach that is deemed to be inapplicable in such anarchical system. In which armed forces are swinging the balance of power on the ground, and redrawing boundaries within and beyond states.

Seen in this light, a further criticism that al-Kawakibi's work faces is neglecting the critical roles by external actors in the socio-political spheres in the Arab world. Al-Kawakibi's reformist paradigm focuses mainly on the internal causes of the decline within the Arab Islamic community without examining the destabilizing implications that external influences pose for the state and the society. The legacy of colonialism and the various alliances between authoritarianism and external state and non-state actors play vital roles in reshaping the region, empowering authoritarian regimes, and undermining progressive change. Therefore, a cohesive reformist project should tackle this issue. However, the core of al-Kawakibi's philosophy lays on the reform 'from-within' and not on the "external pressure confronting it" (Rahme 1999).

In sum, although al-Kawakibi's thoughts are revolutionary by nature, he eloquently illustrates that despotism cannot be abolished through revolution only, rather it requires the evolution of society. The Arab Spring constituted a crucial juncture in this evolution.

Key Readings

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Yassin Al Haj Saleh

Fadi Nicholas Nasser

Much of social and political theory is borne out of the struggle to not only bear witness to the presence of injustice in our world, but to subvert its varied and often compounded grip on our lives and futures. Whether it is to make life more free, bearable, inclusive, equitable, or just, social theory is centered in answering existential issues that tear at the human condition. In the end, it is its people-centric roots that have allowed for its transformative applications across time and space. One still has much to learn reading Hannah Arendt, Angela Davis, Aimé Césaire... in the Middle East today. Of course, the applications of this knowledge extend beyond the particular area of focus of these intellectuals—there are methods, ways of looking at the world and our place in it, approaches to identifying oppression and working towards freedom from it, that matter.

The Middle East is certainly a region where such social discourses resonate so profoundly, but it is also one that has much to teach the world. Momentous phenomena, such as protracted authoritarianism, revolutions in spite of them, inflexible counter-revolutionary movements, or the consequences of impunity and selective justice, not only have such critical impacts on those living through them, they also draw attention to larger social and political axioms that govern our world. Not since Edward Said has an intellectual from the Middle East helped the world see itself by looking at the region as the Syrian intellectual and dissident Yassin al-Haj Saleh. Al-Haj Saleh's rebuking of neo-orientalists, on the right and left, that seek to represent others they believe cannot represent themselves, speaks to the urgency of returning to the heart of social and political theory—the pursuit of truth, not as an academic exercise, but as a struggle for freedom—and the need to center the voices working towards that liberation. Indeed, it is the 'dialectics of struggle', Said reminds us, that distinguishes "The Wretched of the Earth" from "Madness and Civilization", and Frantz Fanon's active commitment to an ongoing, collective struggle as opposed to Michel Foucault's scholastic tradition of 'acquiring a reputation for learning, brilliance...' that makes the work the more significant of the two.¹⁷ In a similar vein, Yassin al-Haj Saleh's work and life, cannot be separated into distinct theoretical and practical domains, and his disruption of what has become a disciplinary norm, presses us to question whether the field of Middle Eastern studies, so inspired by Said, has followed the tradition of the early Foucault or that of Fanon.

Main Argument: The Dialectics of Struggle

Almost every profile of Yassin al-Haj Saleh, starts off with a brief allusion to the 16 years in which he was imprisoned in Syria for his political convictions. The theft of a man's youth in a sentence. But it is the Syrian prison—the suppression of freedom; the normalization of torture and violence; the manufacturing of fear and weaponizing of trauma to suffocate trust and pit those trapped in its grasp against one another—that defines the authoritarianism of Assad's rule. And it is the extraordinary

¹⁷ For more on Edward Said's reflections, refer to: Edward W. Said, "The Shadow of the West," in *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, edited by Gauri Viswanathan (New York: Vintage Books, 2002).

defiance of victims and survivors of such monstrosities and the ongoing struggle for freedom and justice that is the conscience of the Syrian Revolution.¹⁸

The Revolution Made Impossible

As brave Iranians put their bodies and lives on the line resisting the Islamic Republic, it is a cruel mockery that the Syrian Revolution and al-Haj Saleh's nuanced account of the challenges it endured, is misconstrued to portray the Iranian regime as inevitable and a people's revolution for freedom, impossible. The Syrian Revolution did not fail; the world continues to fail Syria. In turn, the absence of any meaningful effort to remedy that failure and effectively respond to authoritarian violence, impunity, and the false politics of inevitability, threatens us all. Al-Haj Saleh's "The Impossible Revolution" is a testimony against that nihilism, offering a detailed portrayal of how decisions, actions, and inactions by the various stakeholders involved in the Syrian tragedy exacerbated structural vulnerabilities and spawned new ones to work against a people's freedom movement. But al-Haj Saleh's book, written in Syria, is not a history of the revolution—it is a living contribution to the revolution. In his review of the book, Sune Haugbolle (2018) really captures that underlying spirit of how al-Haj Saleh is not 'thinking about the revolution', but 'thinking with it.'¹⁹ It's a point that speaks to the growing disconnect in academia and brings us back to that distinction between Fanon and Foucault. We cannot write about injustice and oppression and the struggle to subvert them without ensuring our words aim to work towards that freedom. That is the responsibility of intellectuals. Not only to speak truth to power. But to fight for the triumph of truth.

Neo-orientalism and the Pitfalls of Anti-imperialism

How unfortunate it is, that the intellectual who insisted upon the sanctity of that responsibility continues to be no friend of the Syrian Revolution. In his blistering critique of Noam Chomsky's engagement on Syria, al-Haj Saleh evidences the failure of Chomsky to "speak the truth and to expose lies" and draws attention to the discontents of 'anti-imperialistic' frameworks that orbit exclusively around imperial power and render invisible all outside it. As al-Haj Saleh writes, Chomsky "...views the Syrian struggle — as with every other struggle — solely through the frame of American imperialism. He is thus blind to the specificities of Syria's politics, society, economy and history" (Saleh, 2022a)

¹⁸ After fifteen years of imprisonment, Al-Haj Saleh was asked by the Syrian authorities to spy on the opposition. He refused. As punishment, he was jailed in the notorious Tadmor Prison forced to endure what he describes as hell. For more on Al-Saleh's, reflections on his imprisonment and the carceral state in Syria, refer to Yassin Al-Haj Saleh, *Bil-Khalas Ya Shabab! 16 'Aman Fi Al-Sujun Al-Suriyya. [Salvation, Oh Youths! 16 Years in Syria's Prisons]*. (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2012).

¹⁹ "Thinking with the revolution involves an attempt to give voice to the desires and hopes of revolutionaries, and to relay the contradictions and challenges that developed in the clash with the Syrian regime, the militarisation of the revolution, the growing Islamist dominance, and the imperialist interventions in the conflict by regional and global powers. It is both an intellectual and personal journey through its frenzy and ultimate tragedy, as it developed from a broad popular 'revolution of the common people', as Saleh describes it in the opening essay of June 2011, to become an orgy of 'militant nihilism', the title of an essay written just one year later." (Haugbolle 2018).

Al-Haj Saleh's critique presses Chomsky to explain—which he has yet to— his tepid condemnation of Assad, invisibilizing of Syrians, endorsement of conspiracy theorists that have denied mass atrocities, and rigid framework based off an epistemology that has no interest in truth or evidence, and instead relies on ideology rather than methods that involve the participation of those affected by the phenomena he seeks to explain. Not only does al-Haj Saleh call out how Chomsky's fixed gaze on U.S. interventions in the region deprioritizes the Assad regime and relativizes its crimes, he makes clear that “[t]he monstrous character of the regime is the central fact of this conflict, indeed of Syria's history since 1970. It is the key to understanding the country's continuing catastrophe and the root of everything else” (2022a).

What's more, his critique does not let Chomsky or his narrow anti-imperialism off the hook in offering no solutions for the survivors of such monstrosity and for failing to acknowledge their agency, autonomy, and legitimate struggle for dignity and freedom.²⁰ Chomsky, he argues, “is instead guided by a dead system that is unresponsive to people's legitimate desire not to live under violent tyranny or to the scale of human suffering and pain inflicted upon them when they act upon that desire” (2022a). In a time of monsters, it is al-Haj Saleh who insists upon the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies.

In Application: ‘Syria is the World’

Yassin al-Haj Saleh bears witness to the dysfunctions of our world, the cruelty of its exclusions, and the unravelling of solidarities²¹ in the face of such existential doom. Syrians' ‘struggle for life’, al-Haj Saleh explains, was ‘impossibly destroyed’ by a collective dehumanization of Syrians. It is not just that local, regional, global, and intellectual hegemony refused to see the value in Syrians' right to freedom and dignity, let alone to life; the universal implications of the deprivation of these rights and the normalization of such injustice continue to be ignored (2022c). Like a germ, the intention to either silence the voices of the oppressed or remain silent to their collective suffering has infected our international system. For if concepts of justice are the cornerstones of our societies, the fate of our connected futures are inevitably tied to the moral compromises allowed in any system. With a prophetic vision reminiscent of Yeats' “Second Coming”, al-Haj Saleh warns us all: “Syria is a worldless microcosm, and I think we are now seeing a Syrianized world failing itself the way Syrians were failed, left to be massacred, dehumanized, and rendered superfluous, to use Arendt's terminology” (2020b).

Yassin al-Haj Saleh does more than draw attention to Syria, he introduces a way to think about Syria that can transform social and political theory and the broader dialectics of struggle by bridging the existing gap between ‘the political’ and ‘the ethical.’²² Notably, his critique of Chomsky and his dead system of thought would resurface following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Once again, similar

²⁰ For example: “The ossification of Chomsky's system of thought explains the paradox of labelling the regime brutal and monstrous without being able to say one positive sentence about any of those who have been struggling against it.” (Saleh, 2022a).

²¹ For more on al-Haj Saleh's critique of solidarity, see: “What was valuable in the concept of solidarity was the framework of worldwide responsibility, breaking down the segregation of human pains from one another. What could retain this value is transcending solidarity to partnership in a world that today progressively forms a single framework of responsibility, but still provides levels of freedom and capability of utmost disparity.” (Saleh, 2022b)

²² For more on al-Haj Saleh's analysis of bridging the political and the ethical, refer to Salah, 2022c.

elements about this dehumanizing approach to anti-imperialism would come to light: the refusal to acknowledge the legitimate freedom struggle of Ukrainians and the injustice they are confronting, the arrogance to dictate to Ukrainians what a just struggle is or is not, the minimizing of imperialisms and violence not caused by the United States or its allies, and the dearth of engagement with local sources or voices.²³ It is for these reasons, that in his own analysis on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, al-Haj Saleh upholds that "Ukraine is a Syrian cause. So is the world." The question, he leaves us ashamed to answer, when will Syria be our cause? (2022d).²⁴

An Issue to be Aware of: More than a Witness

Yassin al-Haj Saleh asks us to look at Syria, its pain, its struggle, its trauma, its people, and their fundamental right to dignity and freedom. He forces us to grapple with the failure of our global solidarities and intellectual institutions to ensure those freedoms, protect those rights, and prevent the horrors that have come to define our world. And it is his words and his defiant life that give hope in a world of such monstrous despair. A hope grounded, not in romanticized ideologies or empty slogans, but in a genuine appreciation for the extraordinary power of ordinary people and their fight for nothing short of their collective freedom. But, as I hope I have tried to make clear, he also presents a theory of liberation that is rooted in people, not ideology. It is a theory that demands we centre the oppressed in our methods and our focus as we position them as the primary audience of our work.

At the heart of any such people-centric approach to the dialectics of struggle is a respect for voices closer to the ground as 'partners' in theorizing about our shared world and more than sources of information to better understand particular struggles. De-colonizing social theory, in other words, requires meaningful commitments to learn from, rather than just study, the Middle East and other regions marginalized from global knowledge production. As Yassin al-Haj (2020a) puts it: "We, as Syrians, are allowed to be "witnesses": we can give testimony, we can tell our own stories, but it is always at a low level of knowledge, below the level of theorizing or conceptualizing about phenomena. In my work, I try to challenge that." In doing so, he offers us the only future *possible*.

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Ibn Khaldun

Ahmed Abozaid

Abdel-Rahman Abu-Zeid Waliuddin Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), also known as Ibn Khaldun, is one of the most prominent Muslim Arab scholars, responsible for articulating a theoretical approach which dismantles the dialectical relationship between the state/authority and violence. Ibn Khaldun's life witnessed several political and social transformations, moving across three continents, from Andalus in the north to the Moroccan desert in the south, from Marrakech in the West to Damascus in the east. He also worked as a senior diplomat and politician with different regimes and governments, from Spanish Christian kings in Castile to the Tatars, and from the Memluks to the Idrisids (an Arab Muslim dynasty from 788 to 974, ruling most of present-day Morocco and parts of present-day western Algeria) in the Maghreb. This rich experience allowed him to introduce and develop a comprehensive framework for understanding religion, identity-based political affiliations, social bases for political authority within processes of state-building, constituting authority, and understanding how states flourish and decay (among other topics) across time until the 15th century. His practical experience and empirical observations drawn from field work and engagement with law and Sharia provided the intellectual grounding for insights published in the widely-cited and well-known book, *al-Muqadema*. Unsurprisingly, for those cognisant of the Arab debates on the issue of religion, there is a consensus among modern Arab scholars that Ibn Khaldun is the most pre-modern Islamic scholar who theoretically contributed to topics of authority, state and human sociology in general.

Main Argument

The definition of the state, authority, political regimes and governments at theoretical and methodological levels is typically restricted to Western comparative politics. As distinctive and highly established modernist products, these terms are used here as synonymous. Indeed, in Arabic, scholars use such terms interchangeably as if they have the same meanings as they are all references to collectives of security forces and police in the Arab context. This selective approach on the use of terminology sits with the well-established traditions in Arabic studies where both words of the 'state' and the 'authority' are used to refer to the same entity, supreme bodies with exclusive and repressive powers. Furthermore, according to a senior Arab political scientist, the post-colonialist Arab world is marked with overlapping or intersections on the definitions and the perceptions of the state, the authority, the regime and the government. From the Khaldunian perspective, the definition of the state becomes, as Ali Saad Allah, Abid al-Jabri and others note, 'a spatial and temporal extension of *asabiyah*'.

For Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyah* relates to the establishment and reinforcement of dominant political groups and also to the systematic oppression of opposite forces. Ibn Khaldun claimed that the main tool used in pursuit of *asabiyah* (by oligarchs, dominant groups or nationalist groups in modern language) is excessive use of violence and coercion, be it material in the shape of police and the army or symbolic in the shape of rhetoric, politicisation, securitisation of Sharia (discourse and ideology). The main contention of Ibn Khaldun is that authority in the Islamic world was formulated (and re-formulated) on the basis of violence and coercion, both physical and symbolic, for the sake of controlling and monopolising political power and for hegemony. In this vein, or what we might call

the Khaldunian perspective, the history of Islamic states is an one of continuous struggle and competition between *ahl al-Sultan* (ruling elites close to the Sultan) and *ahal al-‘Ilm* (scholars) or *ahl al-Sayef* (owners of the sword) and *ahl al-Qalm* (owners of the pen). According to Albert Hourani, the relationship between the authority (the state) and society in the Islamic world is always a one between the ruling elites (the authority) and public opposition, especially scholars or intellectuals. Therefore, we cannot separate between state violence, legitimacy and authority since the creation of the so-called modern Arab state at the end of the 19th century especially if we exclusively depend on Western/imperialist readings (liberalism, Marxism, nationalism) or traditional readings (orientalist or Salafist studies).

Critical engagement with the theory of Ibn Khaldun drawing on discussion of the state, authority, legitimacy and violence on one hand and with the modern trans-temporal or -spatial interpretation on the other, reveal how the imperial and colonial powers (for implicit or explicit reasons) did not undermine or erode the importance of traditional structures of authority. Instead, colonial powers kept these structures and practices in order to serve imperial interests. Despite their support for attempts to expand the creation of representative and parliamentary institutions, the status quo in Arab countries was imposed through different. Similarly, the powers’ actions towards opposition forces and dissidents during the colonial or post-colonial eras remained draconian. The emergence of power was not necessarily based on the classical Khaldunian criteria, but it took different forms, shaped by the complexities and contingencies of different social or political formulations and milieu. These formulations were class-based (i.e. the bourgeois), ethnicity-based (i.e. Turks, Carcassians, Europeans) or profession-based (e.g. the army and landowners). Historical records show that living under a modern national state has done nothing but submitting its citizens to imitating the colonial powers, an inevitable outcome for the disappearance of predominant power to become a defeated power imitating the winning power as Ibn Khaldun predicted.

In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun does not use the word violence but rather *qahr* [brute force], *ghalba* [preponderance or dominance] and *shawka* [brute violence and repression] whose main point of reference is the excessive use of force for political purposes rather than everyday practices as stressed in Arab dictionaries on their definition of ‘violence’

There are two kinds of the foundational elements as per the rule in Islamic authority. The first element is the top-down violence of the state towards opposition. The second element is the systematic process of politicising and securitising Sharia, and later on, the secular laws imported from the outside before being excessively blended with the traditional Sharia laws, as part of justifying repression and radical actions towards opposition forces discrediting these despotic authorities. According to Ibn Khaldun, these formations were not born today but are products or the outcome of hierarchical, historical and established structures in the process of creating the state and the Islamic *umma* since the 7th century. I here refer to violence neither as an inherited phenomenon not as an inherent cultural feature that set the cultures of specific societies from others. This understanding is evident in Ibn Khaldun’s analysis of the *al-fitna al-kubra* , (or the second civil war in Islam) and the struggle between the two Islamic caliphs Muawiyya and Ali as well other power struggles in the first seven centuries of the history of Islam. Contemporary researchers tend to interpret this event as counter-revolutionary action led by Muawaiya as a coup against the caliphate.

In Application

As Ibn Khaldun was originally a theorist (a feature almost fully ignored in most of the modern interpretations of his works), his works have a global expansion, in comparison with the regional feature of theories and works of European centralism. I believe that the best contribution of Ibn Khaldun in the international relations, along with his contributions of Mustapha Pasha and Robert Cox among others, is posing a challenge to knowledge communities controlling the interpretations of processes of forming the state and constituting the authority and competitions between the cross-national forces across history. Ibn Khaldun's theory on *asabiyya* offers a thought-provoking analysis of the dynamics of the rise and fall of dynasties and ruling authorities from the 15th century. Instead of replacing them with new modern and fully European models, they become fully blended within the context of complex sophisticated processes and different forms of hybridity, mutual existence and different forms of governability, social accountability and discipline.

The re-evaluation of the ideas of Ibn-Khaldun contributes to the establishment of a general theory through which we can understand the relationship and dynamics of forming the state and the institutionalised role of violence in the process. As Weberian concepts on how to understand the Westphalian nation state as the main unit of analysis in most modern international relations theories, the non-Western concepts and other forms of government and political groupings were excluded. This form of 'epistemic oppression' led to the erosion and exclusion of many historical, political, social and cultural scholarship and expertise (that is non-Western and pre-modernist and which could help deepen our understanding of the history of the world).

It is fair to argue that as the state/authority (empires) were mostly violent, oppressive and cruel, the Islamic society has not been equally violent, especially as it was not enslaved or even in cognisance of the culture of resistance as some Orientalist studies went for. The historical empirical studies emphasise that the Islamic society has always been in a permanent and continuous state of revolution and rebellion against the oppressive authorities, but none of these revolutionary movements (with political and social goals) were able to successfully replace the authority with another that is more just, representative or less excessively violent.

Building on Ibn Khaldun is a methodological choice to end colonialism, posit a form knowledge resistance and initiate a rebellion against epistemic oppression drawn on the dominant western forms of knowledge. The Khaldunian concepts can help complete projects of international relations towards a better understanding of the history of regimes, civilisations and international modernism. This will also help dismantle the historical formulations for the state, political societies, governments, institutions, regimes, and scholarship on forms of the state, the role of violence and law in these operations. Many of the social formulations, values and political rules analysed and debated by Ibn Khaldun are still effectively present. However, most scholarship on the state, authority and political violence insist these manifestations and rules were either undermined or disappeared in the modern global order. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun enriches our understanding of the process of forming the state and constituting authority as well as making legitimacy. Our goal can be realised through paying attention to the role and functions of local political and social formulations and structures, political alliances between dominant groups, struggles with rivals among other steps in the internal and external decision-making processes.

To conclude, we can argue that the Khaldunian example can help unveil dynamics and means under which the European colonialism got established from the 16th century until the 19th century. The same applies to the process of maintaining dominant social or political groups, *asabiya*, and how to use hegemony and repression to control and dominate as Ibn Khaldun insightfully and cogently claimed at the end of the 14th century.

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Judith N. Shklar

Amal Bourhrous

Judith N. Shklar (1928-1992) is a political theorist of the margins. Her focus is not on the elaboration of a theory of justice, but rather on thinking politics from the perspective of injustice, hearing the voices of the victims, and taking their points of view into account. Her political theory is less concerned with the state and forms of government as theoretical concepts, and more concerned with their concrete implications for people, especially with regards to experiences of cruelty, oppression, and fear.

Intellectual context

As a political thinker, Shklar herself has largely remained on the margins, despite being a distinguished Harvard professor, and only recently has there been a growing interest in her political theory. She is often compared to Hannah Arendt, as their biographies are similar and the political thought of one is often considered as the mirror image of that of the other (Bajohr 2021). Like Arendt, Shklar came from a Jewish family and was forced to leave her home during the second World War. Her journey as a refugee took her from Riga, Latvia to Sweden, then to the United States where she and her family were detained as illegal immigrants, before finally obtaining asylum in Canada in 1941 (Hess 2014). In the case of both Arendt and Shklar, the horrors of totalitarianism in the 20th century and the personal experience of exile and refuge largely shaped their political thought. There are, however, significant differences in their political thinking, not least the kind of liberalism each one of them propounds. While the detour by Arendt can certainly shed light on aspects of Shklar's political theory, it is also important to consider Shklar's ideas in their own right. Her contributions to political theory are considerable and they can also offer many insights that can be useful in the study of politics in the Middle East.

Key argument

Shklar's political theory is characterized by rigor and sobriety, and is strongly influenced by the skeptical tradition of Montaigne and Montesquieu. As George Kateb (1998, pp. xvi-xvii) points out, moderation and an aversion for excess are key characteristics of her thought in that "she fears elites, and she also fears ordinary people when they are amassed together in action or mobilized to act. She fears the power of the powerful and the irrationality of the many. Yet she does not want the few to disappear or the many to be dominated."

One will not find a systematic political theory in Shklar's work. As she herself put it, she does not engage in the kind of political theory that analyses concepts and constructs models, but seeks "a more concrete way of thinking about politics, one closer to men and events and to our historical preoccupations and institutions" (Shklar, 1984, p. 228). However, while her writings appear to be disparate – addressing different themes and engaging with a variety of thinkers and genres – in reality

they are connected by a common thread: her preoccupation with cruelty, oppression, and injustice and with the possibility of preventing them and reducing their occurrence.

Shklar approaches injustice and oppression from different angles. One of them is her sharp analysis of moral psychology. Throughout her work, but particularly in *Ordinary Vices* (1984), Shklar looks at the sentiments and the motives that drive human tendencies to inflict harm and to commit atrocities. Vices, she says, are not just flaws of character; they also have implications for public life. Their political dimension and their implications for government, institutions, and citizens make them relevant to liberal political theory. Of all vices, the greatest, in Shklar's view, is cruelty. Cruelty is "the evil, the threat to be avoided at all costs" (Shklar, 1984, p. 237).

Shklar's focus on vices and moral psychology is not part of some belief in the perfectibility of the human moral character. Shklar is a liberal, but she defends a "barebones liberalism" independent of human virtue and free of utopian ideals, the teleology of progress, and the quest of the perfect society. Hers is a liberalism without illusions that focuses, above all, on avoiding cruelty, oppression, and fear. The liberalism of fear, Shklar writes, does not 'offer a *summum bonum* towards which all political agents should strive, but it certainly does begin with a *summum malum*, which all of us know and would avoid if only we could. That evil is cruelty and the fear it inspires, and the very fear of fear itself" (Shklar, 1989, p. 29).

Shklar's plea to "put cruelty first" connects her interest in moral psychology to the analysis of the workings of power, government, and the state. As Shklar put it "while the sources of social oppression are indeed numerous, none has the deadly effect of those who, as the agents of the modern state, have unique resources of physical might and persuasion at their disposal" (Shklar 1989, 21). The liberalism of fear never loses sight of the fact that coercion and the ability to perpetrate violence and cause fear are at the core of government and political power.

For Shklar the state is not an abstract notion, but a concrete reality, actualized through the bureaucratic apparatus of the state and the social agents who embody its authority (Benhabib 1994). The behaviour and the moral integrity of bureaucrats, public officials, and political leaders thus matter greatly because their action (or inaction) can give rise to experiences and perceptions of injustice (Shklar, 1990). Understanding the sense of injustice and taking seriously the point of view of the victims highlight the many faces of injustice, including passive injustice and injustice dressed as inevitable misfortune. In decentring the state and focusing on political experiences on the margins, Shklar thus challenges the tendency of political theory to dismiss injustice as the mere opposite of justice.

A good example of Shklar's way of thinking the margins is her critical account of American citizenship, which highlights the plight of the disenfranchised that have been excluded from it, namely women and slaves who were denied political rights (Shklar, 1991). Her focus on the margins also allows her to view exile as an important category in political theory, inasmuch as it illuminates the complex linkages between loyalty and political obligation. Loyalty, Shklar argues, is the emotional attachment to a group (whether defined by nationality, ethnicity, religion, ideology) while political obligation refers to compliance with a rules and laws (Shklar, 1993). Sometimes, loyalty sustains obligation, but oftentimes the two clash and collide.

In application

Shklar's political thought is rooted in the American and, to a lesser extent, the European context. Her critique of liberalism is mainly directed towards liberal democratic political systems, and her hope is to redeem liberal political theory. Nonetheless, Shklar's outlook on politics, her reflections on cruelty and fear, her insistence on giving injustice its due and listening to the victims, and her thoughts on citizenship, loyalty, and exile are important beyond their original context and offer insights for the study of the Middle East.

The resilience of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East is inseparable from their control of fierce coercive states that have the ability and the means to use physical violence and brute force to dominate societies, stifle dissent, and ensure regime survival (Ayubi, 1995). Cruelty and fear are common in state-society relations in many Middle Eastern countries, and it is precisely this dimension of the power of the state and of rulers that the political thought of Shklar pays close attention to.

However, even in authoritarian contexts, and under extremely repressive conditions, mass protests have erupted and continue to erupt throughout the Middle East, their spark often ignited by the sense of injustice harboured by the vulnerable and marginalized segments of society. The latter's grievances include pervasive corruption, routine abuses, daily humiliations and violations of human dignity. As Shklar argued, the line separating misfortune and injustice is often a political one. The demands of social justice that have spurred protest movements in several countries contest this line and show that what is often presented as misfortune are actually deeply seated injustices.

Shklar's different account of American citizenship, which takes as its point of departure the disenfranchised, is also relevant for the study of the Middle East, where struggles for citizenship reflect dynamics of inclusion and exclusion along the lines of gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, tribe, and so forth. It also puts into sharp focus the precarious situation of stateless persons, refugees, illegal immigrants, and alien guest workers whose access to citizenship is greatly constrained in several Middle Eastern countries.

This discussion about inclusion in and exclusion from citizenship is also intricately connected to Shklar's reflections on loyalty, political obligation, and exile, which are particularly useful for the study of Middle Eastern diasporas. Tensions between the sense of loyalty to a social group (national, ethnic, sectarian, religious, etc.) and political obligation to the state have informed, at least in part, the decision of many members of these diasporas to leave their countries of origin. While they may retain an emotional attachment to what they have left behind, for many of them, leaving largely signifies a withdrawal of consent to be bound by the rules and the laws of the state and a relinquishment of political obligation to it. This raises questions about the extent to which political obligation can be expected in contexts of pervasive injustice, cruelty, and fear. It also raises questions about the meaning of belonging, especially when certain loyalties collide with political obligations and demands for loyalty in host countries.

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Mari J. Matsuda

Meray Maddah

Professor Mari Matsuda is a civil rights lawyer, peace activist, and an established scholar. Her academic contribution is rooted in the American legal discourse, jurisprudence of the outsider, feminist critique of law and, not in the least, Critical Race Theory (CRT). Merited as one of the founding thinkers and practitioners behind Critical Race Theory, Matsuda's lawyerly work coalesces the academic and the practical. As a critical race theorist, she examined the legacy of the American legal system, and its historical establishment, from a bottom-up outlook (Matsuda, 1987). Reinforcing the victim's perception against institutionalised disparities, Matsuda sided with the underdog. Her work emphasised that *only* through the scrutiny of the legal system can there be a viability for historical reparations, justice, and most importantly, peace for all society's factions.

Intellectual context

Empowered by the founding figures of CRT, like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic, Matsuda's scholarship advanced the discourse on the interplay of race, power, and law. Nonetheless, an examination of CRT's history requires an understanding of how this legal critique originated, which is, through the Critical Legal Studies movement.

Described as a peripheral legal theory, the Critical Legal Studies movement (CLS) emerged in the late-1970s. The movement's first conference was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1989 through a group of "legal radicals and New Leftist professors" (Baumgardner, 2021, p. 7). The inception period of the CLS movement was greatly influenced by the protests against the Vietnam War, the rise of women faculty members in academic bodies, and the overriding by-products of the civil rights movement.

Commonly referred to its advocates and members as the 'Crits', the CLS movement was an outgrowth of the Legal Realism school with a combination of feminist, philosophical and post-modernistic interpretations (Tushnet, 1991, pp. 1516-1518). Notwithstanding the American context of the CLS movement's birth, the Crits acquiesced, in a lesser extent, with European social theorems through a nod to Max Weber's concept of legitimation and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (Trubek, 1984, pp. 595-607). Still, the left leaning CLS movement, at its core, deviated away from the traditionally defined Marxist arguments (Boyle, 1985, pp. 721-725; Hunter, 2021, p. 390).

Viewed as disrupters to the normative legal curriculum, CLS scholars adopted the indeterminacy thesis in law, inasmuch, they rejected the assuming ideals of formalism as well as objectivism and its constructive development. These arguments were painstakingly clear in CLS associate Roberto Mangabeira Unger's manuscript, "*The Critical Legal Studies Movement*" which is one of the marking documents in the movement's history, its contextualisation and further development (Unger, 1983).

Departing from the CLS movement, it informs us about the foundations of CRT. As articulated by notable CRT scholars, Delgado and Stefancic, “critical race theory [is a movement that] questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.” (Delgado et al., 1995, pp. 28-29). In essence, CRT orbits around the nexus of race, racism, and law. It theorizes that not only is race, a social construct, demonstrated by individual biases through racism; but also, this prejudice is entrenched in the legal system and adversely affects people of colour in all corners of life.

Key arguments

Like her peers, Matsuda’s writings and work on race, racism, and power dynamics is informed by an intersectional approach. Using feminist critique to analyse the notion of abstractionism proposed by John Rawls’ Theory of Justice, Matsuda contests the foundation of America’s liberalism, based on ideology, insofar she highlights the lack of that very foundation to begin with. She underscores that abstract theory-building fails without a “contextual understanding” all while leaning on feminist anthologies that the human personality is not a fixed force majeure incapable of alternative conceptions of justice (Matsuda, 1986, pp. 617-624; 1989b, p. 9). In one of her clearest interpretations of feminist arguments, she reminds us that, “[in the] primary tenet of feminist theory, the personal is political” (Matsuda, 1986, p. 614).

For Matsuda, themes of inclusion and community-based work resonate deeply in her scholarship. As Janine Young Kim points out, while revisiting the scholar’s *Looking to the Bottom* essay, “Sometimes the best theories are those that seem to tell us what is obvious but unspoken” (Kim, 2014, p. 101), while adding that, “[Matsuda]spoke to the ideas of diversity and inclusion in ways that advanced the material situation of racial minorities.” (Kim, 2014, p. 103). She invites the reader to have a hands-on experience with communities and to imagine how everyday struggles look like, especially when racial hierarchies have the power to pollute consciousness.

Furthermore, Matsuda’s Asian-American heritage is featured prominently and intertwines with her work on CRT and its manifestations. In a keynote talk to the Asian Law Caucus, she addressed “racial bourgeoisie” and “Asian bashing” when fearmongering is turned against the Asian-American community (Matsuda, 1990b, pp. 79, 82). She writes how the Asian-American experience was traditionally shaped as an American scapegoat, “the oriental menace” as she puts it; still, she reiterates that upholding affirmative action is a successful tool for Asian-Americans to attain educational opportunities and leadership goals (Matsuda, 1990b, p. 81)

As a critical race theorist, Matsuda’s wisdom combines the personal and the professional to make light of historical injustices. She dissects racial structures and the subhuman narratives while borrowing stories from her mother’s past growing up on a sugar plantation in Hawaii. She employs her Okinawan heritage to connect to other people of colour and their fight against racism while declaring that “law is essentially political” in matters of “street wisdom” (Matsuda, 1989a, p. 2324). She recounts the lynching of the Chinese and the burning down of several Chinatowns in 1871 Los Angeles while illustrating how the legal system is laced with racial discrimination, thus, connecting it to the African American familiarity and history of slavery (Matsuda, 2001, pp. 169-186).

In similar importance, Matsuda's work challenges the absence of openly queer scholars in academic spaces (Matsuda, 1990a, p. 1765). As an intersectional feminist, she often spoke of how the legal industrial complex, in many ways than none, was a foe to queer communities and sexual minorities. She did not shy away, however, from pointing out the homophobia present in Asian-American communities. Per her arguments, this homophobia is rooted in the intolerance and fear of that community against any additional difference practiced by the white society (Matsuda, 1990b, p. 82). In one of her familiar stories, Matsuda uses her personal experience again and wishes that, one day, she would dance at her gay cousin's wedding (Matsuda, 2005, p. 188).

In her *Love, Change* essay, she writes about her pedagogy when teaching law to her students and how matters of the heart and wanting to be loved weave into the legal. As a result, the CRT scholar that she is, Matsuda reaffirms that, "Law is how we make claims both for social meaning and for ultimate validation of our personhood" (Matsuda, 2005, p. 194). For this reason and many others, the brilliance of Matsuda's work lies in its simplicity yet veracity as she always stood up for the "talented outsider" (Williams, 1991, p. 298) and defied principles of neutrality which fundamentally made her a beacon of academic and cultural influence.

In application

Discussions on racial fault-lines and race-based discrimination are often associated with the Global North/Western context and particularly in the American scope. Nonetheless, beyond the binaries of black-and-white, racism *is* a prevalent issue in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). Racial hierarchies dominate countless systems of governance, judicial branches, and how residents and citizens interact with one another in the MENA region. Not to mention relevant topics on sense of belonging, colourism, and indigenous groups.

On the structures of racism, Matsuda cautions us how institutional bodies can preserve and spread both covert and overt forms of racism in different ways (Matsuda, 1993, p. 34). Racist hate messaging and propaganda, as well as physical violence are easy to spot given their outward effects. However, when the ruling systems are entrenched with covert designs aimed for self-fulfilling gain and power, policies that are based on racial and ethnic discrimination become the default. Departing from this note, Matsuda's insights become less foreign to Middle Eastern literature and more intertwined with conversations on which dominant group holds the power and for what purpose.

In the MENA, one of the most pronounced effects of racial hierarchies in legal structures is the *kafala* system. This system of sponsorship, for the recruitment purposes of migrant workers, is a notorious and a heavily scrutinized subject in a variety of MENA countries. Studies at length have illustrated how the *kafala* system is inhumane at best, whereby its repercussions are nothing short of human rights violence and the complete humiliation of migrant workers and their status. Furthermore, the *kafala* system performs as an extension of capitalistic endeavours in modern day societies. Thus, to think of Matsuda's work is to think of how much capitalism is engrained in several of the region's political economies and incidents of labour exploitation.

Even when labour provisions preside in MENA countries, the harm by the employer, and by the state's legal system at large, makes *kafala* a 'law-like' institutionalised form of exploitation and

abuse (Khan & Harroff-Tavel, 2011, pp. 297-299). Here, we are reminded by Matsuda's statement on how critical scholars recognize that, "[law] consists of language, ideals, signs, and structures that have material and moral consequences." (Matsuda, 1987, p. 337).

Likewise, a bastardized version of racial hierarchies in the MENA is through sectarianism. And like racism, the nature of sectarianism is based on social constructs. As experienced by populations in countries like Iraq and Lebanon, ethno-sectarian cleavages govern ruling systems and regulations through sect-appointed elites. Whether it was called *al-Muhasasa Ta'ifia* or *al-Tawafuq al-Siyasi*, it is safe to argue that in these countries, sectarian power-sharing dynamics have been the bedrock of their institutions.

Sectarianism, in these MENA countries, seeped through every branch of society, and government, and instilled a sense of fear among people wherewith state-society relations became its primary victim. As a result, a deep sense of distrust and intolerance emerged towards *the other*. This tactic of *othering* is one of Matsuda's points in examining the theory of subordination and patterns of oppression. However, an antidote to this oppression, as illustrated by Matsuda, simply lies in "asking the other question" (Matsuda, 1991, pp. 1188-1190). She uses this method as form of dismantling the powers of domination while wielding coalition forces to gauge levels of subordination.

Also within the MENA, socioeconomic divisions and issues of mobility caused by sectarianism can be traced back to the region's history with colonialism (AlShehabi, 2017). With this in mind, colonialism has been the backdrop of many of Matsuda's writings and, most importantly, personal heritage. A Hawaiian scholar with a Japanese ancestry, she notifies us that it would be a "misreading" of critical race theory if it was divorced from the critique on both colonialism and capitalism (Matsuda, 2021). Therefore, when examining ethno-sectarian tensions in the MENA, the theory of critical race is an applicable mean to unpack grievances and everyday issues experienced by the region's population.

In summary, Professor Matsuda's impact on social theory, principally through CRT and feminist analysis, moves beyond geographical borders, political circles, and legal chambers. Her scholarship continues to influence the field of social sciences through the prism of community-based work and scholarly activism.

Issues to be aware of

The history of CRT and its development, however, did not come to life without controversies. After all, no social theory is immune to critiques and CRT was not an exception to this rule. Yet, the most recent criticism against CRT was not within academic spaces, rather, in mainstream media. During the tenure of former U.S. President Donald Trump, CRT debates made news headlines, specifically in right-wing media. Conservative pundits claimed that CRT defied the chief principles of the First Amendment and promoted the obsession over 'woke' politics. Other analysts created online trackers to see if state legislatures introduced bills regarding K-12 school syllabi and CRT-influenced education. Similarly, during that period, an executive order, and notices to federal agencies were made as an attempt to fight the "divisive rhetoric" that racism and racial bias are baked into American institutions and laws.

Nonetheless in 2021, an Ipsos/Reuters national survey was conducted to see the percentage of Americans that are familiar with CRT, the arguments surrounding it, and to what extent do they agree or disagree with CRT's main principles. The results conveyed that about 43 percent of those surveyed were somewhat familiar with the term; and among this group, only 5 percent answered correctly when it comes to the history and teachings of CRT. Not only do the results signify that very few understand what CRT really is; but also, they represent considerable misconceptions of CRT and its core meaning.

In hindsight of this discussion and divisions concerning CRT and what it stands for, it raises significant questions, one of them being as to how countries and their corresponding institutions reckon with the history of violence and oppression. More so, it creates a dialogue as to what extent should laws and procedures be re-examined when minority groups are affected by racial hierarchies in a variety of ways. Ultimately, CRT is not meant to advocate for a blaming ideology. On the contrary, it encourages citizens alike to revisit history, recognise the volatility of oppressive behaviours, and commence solutions that equally benefit all of society's diverse groups.

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Kimberlé Crenshaw

Anne Kirstine Rønn

In 1976, five black women sued General Motors for race and sex discrimination. The company's workforce segregation, they argued, left black women in a uniquely unfortunate situation. They could not take black jobs, because these were meant for men. Neither could they take women's jobs, which were meant for white women only. The court, however, dismissed their claim, arguing that race and sex could be treated separately (Crenshaw, 2013)

Thirteen years later, Kimberlé Crenshaw, a young scholar from UCLA, published a landmark essay, criticizing the court's decision. In the essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, Crenshaw argued that the case against General Motors in fact illustrated that repression and discrimination can only be understood when considering the *intersectional* nature of identities.

The term *intersectionality*, which Kimberlé Crenshaw coined in this 1989 essay, is today a focal point in studies of identity, discrimination and injustice. It contributes to cement Crenshaw's status as one of the most influential recent scholars, not only within legal theory, but also in the broader fields of sociology and contentious politics. In this intervention, I reflect on the legacy of Crenshaw's work on intersectionality and discuss its application within studies of the Middle East.

Intellectual (and practical) contribution

Intersectionality is widely understood as the critical insight that identities such as social class, race and gender are reciprocally constructing phenomena, and that this reciprocity shapes complex social inequalities (Collins, 2015). Today, the concept has become so dominant that it is rare to find a textbook in social sciences without some reference to the "intersection of race, gender, and class" (Belkhir & Barnett, 2001, p. 158). However, it was born out of Crenshaw and her colleagues' early efforts to challenge the way race and gender was dealt with in legal studies.

Already as a law student at Harvard, Crenshaw was part of a movement that sought to push the faculty to offer courses on issues of minority rights and race. In 1986, when she joined UCLA School of Law, she started gathering colleagues around a new intellectual project that should provide a critical and coherent account of race and law. Critical Race Theory, as the project came to be titled, became a widely used conceptual framework for examining intersectional injustices within the laws and legal institutions (Crenshaw, 2001).

The term intersectionality, however, was never intended to be confined to the study of legal discrimination. Neither was it supposed to serve only as a theoretical concept. As Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) note, intersectionality has today evolved as an interdisciplinary analytical approach and a practice. It informs the empirical study of how identities and systems of oppression overlap and reinforce each other (Collins, 2015), and it serves as a strategy to address hidden modes

of repression across different spheres in society; from social movements to workplaces (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Gökarıksel & Smith, 2017; Lopez & García, 2014).

Recently, intersectional thinking has also come to play an increasingly salient role for social movements and civil society. It has been at the core of the discussions about inclusivity in the Occupy Movement and the feminist marches in the United States (Boothroyd et al., 2017; Wrenn, 2019), and it features regularly in the vocabulary and repertoires of activists. In the Occupy Movement, for instance, activists practiced intersectional thinking through workshops, where participants discussed power inequalities and positionality (Juris et al., 2012).

In application

It has taken a bit longer for intersectionality to gain foothold within studies of the Middle East. However, there has been a growing tendency among Middle East scholars to adopt the term, especially to scrutinize the role of gender and sexuality in the region's contentious politics (Moghadam, 2008; Rahman, 2010). Notably, intersectional approaches to the Arab Uprisings have contributed to shed light on the unique effects authoritarian regimes have on women from different social backgrounds and facilitate a deeper understanding of the motivations and fears women had in relation to participating in the uprisings against these regimes (Salem, 2014; Stephan & Charrad, 2020).

Recently, studies have also drawn attention to the ways intersectional thinking has been practiced among social movements in the region, particularly feminists and the LGBT+ community. In their study of feminist activism in during the 2010-2011 uprising Tunisia (Clark & Krichah, 2021) show that intersectionality was one of the primary concerns of the secular feminist groups that emerged from and operated in the uprising, and in their recent book, Nagle and Fakhoury (2021) explain how intersectional activism has been practiced within Lebanon's LGBT+ community. As pointed out by Nagle (2021, p. 7), the past years have seen a rise of "intersectionalists" across divided societies in the region. These actors, who have emerged at the grassroots level, "seek to identify the multiple pinpoints through which the sectarian system creates inequalities while simultaneously creating alliances across marginalized groups to attack the system at its weak points".

While intersectionality has mostly been used in relation to gender and sexuality in the Middle East, the potential of an intersectional approach to the study of Middle East politics and society extends beyond these topics. First of all, intersectionality presents a way to challenge the tendency of past studies to adopt sectarianism as the dominant explanation to social and political developments. As several scholars have pointed out, such one-dimensional focus on sect-based divides overshadows the role of factors such as class, gender, tribalism and regionalism (Deeb, 2020; Ghosn & Parkinson, 2019; Majed, 2016, 2021; Makdisi, 2017; Nucho, 2016; Ozcelik, 2022). Here, intersectionality offers a grip to explore class and other identities as interrelated with sect.

Secondly, an intersectional approach prompts Middle East scholars to examine inclusion, marginalization and protest participation in a more critical light and may help turn focus on issues that fall under the radar. The Lebanese October Uprising serves as a good example of this. If we examine inclusion of sect, class and regions separately, the uprising appears to successful in its inclusion of citizens. Surveys among protesters show there was relatively even participation across sects (Bou Khater & Majed, 2020). Likewise, the uprising was celebrated for its diversity in terms of socialclass backgrounds and for the fact that people took to the streets across the entire country. However, if we examine inclusion through an intersectional lens, we can identify subgroups within the population which were difficult to include, due to their particular combinations of sect, class and geographic belonging. An example of such group is residents from the neighborhoods of Khandak el Ghamiq and Dahiyeh, two Shiite majority neighborhoods in and around Beirut, which are known as strongholds of Amal Movement and Hezbollah. While protesters expressed strong statements of solidarity with Shiite protesters from other parts of Lebanon and with lower class segments, negative stereotyping of residents from the two areas prevailed. These stereotypes cannot be understood with reference to social class, sect or geography alone. To understand why the uprising fell short in promoting solidarity with residents of Khandak el Ghamiqand Dahiyeh Rather, we must look to their intersecting identities as predominantly lower-class Shiites from areas with unique political, cultural, and historical features.

This is not to claim that studies of Middle East societies become simplistic and one-dimensional without the application of Kimberlé Crenshaw's work. The interrelation of identities has been dealt with empirically in much existing research on the region and can be studied without explicit theoretical reference to critical race theory and intersectionality. However, to develop our knowledge on the relation between sect, class, geography and other identities, we need a common language and systematic analytical approach. It is on this aspect Crenshaw has valuable insights to offer.

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Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe

Betul Dogan-Akkas

Argentine political philosopher Ernesto Laclau was renowned for his ideas about hegemony and crisis that influenced politicians and scholars around the world. In his highly original writings, he revisits Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony and power and probes Marxism's assumptions as he explores in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* with Chantal Mouffe. Laclau's writings offer a devastating critique of Latin American politics by examining political populism and radical democracy. Laclau was born in Buenos Aires and later studied history at Oxford with Eric Hobsbawm in the 1970s. He started teaching politics at the University of Essex in 1973, where he met his wife Mouffe, and together they founded a school of poststructural discourse theory (PDT or discourse theory).

Key Argument

According to Bassel F. Salloukh, in his previous piece for the series on social theory, Gramsci's work has been incorporated into MENA studies from a variety of perspectives. With Gramsci's initial writings on hegemony and organic crisis, Laclau and Mouffe's seminal book examined hegemonic struggles, hegemonization, hegemonic practices and a new definition of power amid all these conceptual discussions. Laclau and Mouffe were inspired by Gramsci's alternative ontological and epistemological foundation that constructs a non-deterministic and well-grounded explanation of social change (Germain & Kenny, 1998). Human subjectivity is being brought to international relations with the approach of avoiding deterministic and ahistorical structuralism in assessing politics. Gramsci's understanding of social class, institutions and the power of ideas were also critical elements in PDT.

To depict the power struggles among the political forces, discourse theory originally incorporated post-structuralist concepts mostly ignored in international relations and politics (Stengel & Nabers, 2019). There are several other books that enrich the theory of hegemony (Nabers, 2015; Stengel & Nabers, 2019) and use it to define hegemonization in emerging discourses (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000), in imaginaries (Smith, 1998), in subregional hegemonization struggles (Nabers, 2010), and in post-crisis hegemonic and discursive interpretations (Nabers, 2009).

Discourse theory depicts hegemony as a fundamental concept with a unique definition of power and crisis. Laclau and Mouffe differentiate emerging hegemonic moves and their outcomes, the first, hegemonic practice, being "the articulation of identity and subjectivity into a common project" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p.14). A hegemonic formation, or institutional version of a hegemonic or counter-hegemonic practice, is a result of these projects' attempts to create new forms of social order from dispersed or dislocated elements (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000).

The common definition of hegemony in mainstream international relations is based on the distribution and mobilization of power resources (Nabers, 2010, p.933). In its realist definition, the concept is a powerful tool for power relations among states and in its structural form (Gill, 1986). Whereas for Laclau and Mouffe (2014) the definition of hegemony is beyond the interest and survival of nation-states containing five main approaches to power and hegemony. Firstly, in the pursuit of hegemony material capabilities are significant for building up power of a state, a political institution or a network of alliances but they are not enough to be a leader without non-material assets such as alliances, power of institutions, and norms and values that dominate given political structure (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014; Nabers, 2010). In this way, we can include the forms of power articulated in the Middle East through tribal relations and non-state actors, religious identities like sects, or political Islam movements. Transnational nature of Shi'a and tribal politics is not explained in other theoretical perspectives other than their relations to identity. Nevertheless, discourse theory encompasses all forms of power relations between political actors (states and non-states). Secondly, determinancy of power in a hegemonic struggle represents continuously constructed and re-articulated elements and articulations. Power is an uneven tool in the cycle of hegemonisation and any emerging counter-hegemonic practices can be the dominating discourse and then again other and new forms of counter-hegemonic myth could occur in a political context. Power struggles and the pursuit of hegemony are in constant transformation.

The third element of power and hegemony in the discourse theory is the argument that defines all forms of political elements as discursively constituted. For any political actor, the meaning of its power capabilities, whether material or non-material are entirely constituted by discursive practices (Nabers, 2010). For Laclau and Mouffe, discourse is not only linguistic materials. Rather, it “includes all meaningful practices, objects, subjects, and so on, then a whole new ontology of the social can be formulated” (Stengel & Nabers, 2019, p.255). This comprehensive approach to discourse is vital for understanding the nature of politics in the Arab Gulf monarchies, because the symbols and traditions of these rentier states are displayed in political moves, but unrecognized in the realist interpretation of power.

Fourthly, discourse theory maintains that after an organic crisis, the sedimented (dominant) hegemonic power is dislocated and the emerging hegemonic interpretations transform into counter-hegemonic myths, mediating the interaction between particularisms and universalities. An emerging hegemonic practice that brings together more social and political forces to represent the post-crisis hegemonic narrative becomes the new imaginary in society. Therefore, power is relevant to reaching an institutional level of discursive recognition that comes with political actions. But if the emergence of a narrative remains as a particular interpretation rather than becoming a historic bloc and moving towards a universal narrative, it will still be a counter-hegemonic myth. Specific particularities that are able to comprehend equivalences and differences in themselves will fix the meaning of empty signifiers and transcend into universality (Nabers, 2019, p.104). The logic of equivalence refers bringing together common content of different demands, but differences are points that the narratives contradict over the hegemony. Power as a relational element of leadership is the final factor in defining power and hegemony in discourse theory. As a post-crisis interpretation becomes imaginary, it passes through the competitions and antagonisms of trench war. According to Laclau and Mouffe, hegemony is an exercise of leadership at the nexus of crisis and change to maintain dominance.

The literature on hegemony, populism and ideology - that Laclau and Mouffe discuss in their joint works or individually - criticises the overtaking or idealisation of the concepts (Critchley and Marchant, 2004; Sinnerbrink, 2010; Borriello & Jäger, 2020; Kouvelakis, 2021). Laclau was primarily criticized for the role of electorate processes, the lack of ideology, and the idealisation of social movements in the conceptualisation of populism. Another criticism of his views on hegemony and power in the Middle East concerns the role of authoritarian states or the lack of social and political arenas that influence policy. Laclau's focus on the Left and the role of politics might seem like his work is irrelevant to the political realm where decision-making is the exclusive domain of elites rather than political parties or social movements. While his writings provide a theoretical description of concepts such as hegemony and power which are deeply ingrained in Middle Eastern politics, his terminology remains useful.

In application

Discourse theory is highly relevant for both meta-theoretical discussions and practice of theory in the Middle East and the GCC providing a seminal theory of hegemony, crisis and power. As the viral letter sent by K. N. Al-Sabah to Financial Times indicates, the post-Arab uprisings Middle East became more complex, intricate and elusive to elaborate than before:

Iran is backing Assad. Gulf states are against Assad! Assad is against Muslim Brotherhood. Muslim Brotherhood and Obama are against General Sissi. But Gulf states are pro-Sissi! Which means they are against Muslim Brotherhood. Iran is pro-Hamas, but Hamas is backing Muslim Brotherhood! Obama is backing Muslim Brotherhood, yet Hamas is against the US! Gulf states are pro-US. But Turkey is with Gulf states against Assad; yet Turkey is pro-Muslim Brotherhood against General Sissi. And General Sissi is being backed by the Gulf states! Welcome to the Middle East and have a nice day.

The Arab Gulf Monarchies and so the Gulf Cooperation Council are sub-regional complexes with unique political practices. The discourse theory's comprehensive interpretation of power and hegemony, as well as its definition of hegemonic struggle, could be used to describe intra-regional and sub-regional strains. Hegemonization that is initially defined by Laclau and Mouffe (2014) and later structured by Smith (1998) has more main overlapping stages and processes that could be used to define intra-(sub)regional power struggles. In a nutshell, hegemonization refers to the transformation of hegemonic power and the emergence of new (counter) hegemonic narratives following an organic crisis. This is the very first stage called dislocation of sedimented hegemonic narrative. For instance, Middle East politics after the Islamic revolution in Iran can be defined as a new era of hegemonization after an organic crisis in representation of dominant interpretations in the region. Furthermore, the regional and sub-regional rivalries that emerged in the Middle East and the GCC after the Arab uprisings- the organic crisis- have the potential to be seen as emerging counter-hegemonic struggles. Discourse theory defines dislocation as the primary precondition for freedom because it opens windows of opportunity for emerging discourses against the sedimented practices in which foundations are cracking (Nabers, 2015). After opening a new era in power relations with an organic crisis, the conjunctural crisis can emerge amid the antagonism and competition of trench war.

This second move introduces 'empty signifiers,' which act as horizons for political 'articulations'. Amid this competition, specific systems of narration, particular interpretations, represent themselves as the only framework to exist as a hegemonic formation in the new era (Smith, 1998). Sectarian

interpretations, proxy wars, and armament in the Middle East since the first organic crisis of 1979 are examples of articulatory practices used to reach an institutional interpretation of hegemonic narrative. Referring back to the comprehensive interpretation of power and alliances, discursive and non-discursive elements are not working against each other, rather they jointly constitute a structure of articulations in these competitions (Stengel & Nabers, 2019).

In the third phase, particular interpretations of a post-crisis era start identifying themselves with specific hegemonic projects (a Sunni bloc under Saudi Hegemony or Iranian proxies) to become predominant and to strengthen their institutional bonds. The historical bloc is the key to understanding this era of hegemonization. As Smith (1998) states, “as the movement begins to act more and more as a hegemonic agent, redefining its demands in the light of other demands, and offering its discourse as a nodal point that symbolically sums up the interests of the other movements...” (p.165). Here the questions of regional threat perceptions and alliances can be answered using the hegemonisation framework around rising nationalism, sectarianism, and the role of political Islam. Although identity dimensions embedded in regional tensions are highly relevant and have been used in studies on the region, discourse theory reads regional competition into a more complex and promising mechanism of power relations, one including both material and non-material parts. For instance, Iran's nuclear enrichment or democratic tendencies in the region are not only a threat to hegemonic narratives because of identity politics or regime security. Rather, the complex map of alliances, military and political power, economic projections and the nexus of leadership and crisis needs to be elaborated and the discourse theory offers a conceptual base for this.

In the last phase, emerging hegemonic or counterhegemonic practices convert into hegemonic structures that go beyond the myth of being 'other' discourse and become institutionalized. Institutionalization refers to the outcome of a contest between competing forces in which one of the historic blocs dominates the narrative by declaring itself the only possible interpretation of the post-crisis era and producing new types of political actions (Nabers, 2010). The Saudi-Iran rivalry, the role of non-Arab powers like Iran, Turkey and Israel, the impact of non-state actors and terrorist groups and sectarian politics are the titles that might be elaborated using post-structural discourse theory's rich conceptual outlook. Does the region or the subregion have an institutional hegemonic power? Or are there multiple hegemonic practices that haven't turned to an imaginary yet? In the MENA, what are the counter-hegemonic narratives or articulations? These are the initial questions that the discourse theory could answer for the Middle East studies literature.

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Ali Al-Wardi

Hadeel Abdelhameed

Ali Al-Wardi (1913-1995) was an Iraqi prominent sociologist, and a theorist who was credited for founding the first Iraqi, and Arab, modern sociology school in the mid-20th century. Al-Wardi's works theorised the psychological, cultural, and material distances between city and country, arguing that this gap hindered the creation of a national collective identity, and thus, needed a continuous governmental intervention. Al-Wardi adapted the works of the classic Arabic philosopher Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) who dichotomised Islamic societies into two main irrevocable spaces; *Bedawa*/ rural, and *Hadara*/ urban. Applying this Khalduni social theory to the Iraqi context, Al-Wardi concluded that the Bedouin amalgamation with the urban societies fostered a dual Iraqi personality that fluctuated between the bedouin/tribal values, and modern traditions of the metropolis. Al-Wardi termed this social episode as *The Ebb and Flow phenomenon* ظاهرة المد والجزر in his book *A study in the Nature of the Iraqi Society* (1965). While the wane/ *ebb* of Bedouin principles, as Al-Wardi suggested, takes place when the state is strong enough to exercise its power and sovereignty, the rise/ *flow* of these values dominate once the state becomes weak, and decentralised. Despite the fact that Al-Wardi was not a political scientist, his works about Iraqi society have been recurrently visited by foreign policy makers, and political pundits to understand the reasons behind Iraq's slow steps in establishing a democratic state post 2003. His works were regularly referenced to analyse the failure of the American occupation to manage, or even to understand, Iraqi social structures, and fabrics in the countryside. Hence going back to Al-Wardi's social theory will offer a new analytical lens to help in understanding the Iraqi political crisis today.

Intellectual Context

Al-Wardi's intellectual formation was a product of the post WWI public intellectual era. The interwar period signified the shift of socio-political philosophy and epistemology from universalism to nationalism, and domestic state-nation relations. Edward Said identified the public intellectuals as a social group who "write[s] to, as well as for, the public". The social role of public intellectual expanded from challenging the previously accepted conventions and dogmas, to critiquing the society through enhancing critical thinking to reach socio political reforms. Centralising the role of the public intellectual spoke to the ethos of autonomy, and nationalism dominated the Iraqi, and Arab, public sphere in a time that was witnessing the demise of colonialism, and the rise of independence. Hence, the dialectical debates about colonial and anticolonial political movements, both communism and nationalism, and the state-building process under modernisation, and urbanisation shaped the national consciousness of the state-nation relation.

Iraqi tribalism occupied a significant space in the state-nation building process, and intellectual debate, when the first modern Iraqi state was installed by the British mandate in 1920. Since the early 20th century, the spatial ontology of the Iraqi nation was constituted by popularising the narrative of the polarity of urbanists and non-urbanists, tribe members and sheikhs, peasants, or ma'dan (marsh dwellers). While the British mandate considered the tribal sheikhs as administrative apparatus to control the rural areas, Iraqi intellectuals looked at them as symbols of the nation's backwardness and

a power against modernity and reform. It is important to emphasise here that the centrality of understanding this urban-rural discourse has set the knowledge production about Iraqi society even by Iraqis themselves. As a public intellectual, not a partisan, Al-Wardi's input to these dialectical conversations about constitutionalism, democracy and individualism underpinned his interest in the psychoanalysis of the Iraqi identity vis-à-vis the nature of the *Hadara- Badawa* conflict. Al-Wardi believed that this spatio-cultural contestation shaped the dynamics of the modern Iraqi state, and collective identity of the Iraqi nation.

Another factor that influenced Al-Wardi's interest in investigating the urban-rural power conflict was his postgraduate studies (M.A. and PhD) at The University of Texas (1945-1950). The post-war intellectual climate in Texas incubated populist intellectualism driven by human rights movements, including those of Black and Hispanic communities. Several intellectual conversations gathered Al-Wardi, Walter Firey, and Carl Martin Rosenquist about the importance to historicise religious and racial structures in urban cities to understand the modern nature of dualism. These conversational relations continued after Al-Wardi's return to Iraq in 1950.

Main Argument

The core of Al-Wardi's social theory can be traced in his works; *A Study into the Nature of Iraqi Society* (1965), and *Social Glimpses from Iraqi Modern History* (1968-1976). In both seminal works, Al-Wardi argues that Iraqi personality suffers from *izdiwajiyah*/ disharmony for embodying urban and Bedouin characteristics. This *izdiwajiyah* was created due to peasants' transitional position from the deserts, and from being Bedouins, to the socio-economic context of urban spaces. Al-Wardi sees that these relocated communities struggle to adapt to the codes and principles of urbanism, preferring to keep their affinity *asabiyah* to their tribe, later on to their sect, rather than abiding by the city laws. The tribal and nomadic values have restructured the Iraqi urban society by introducing clanic codes of behaviour, morals, and rules of conduct to the sedentary city centres. Nomadic values are instigated from the cruel environment of the desert that forces the ethos of *asabiyah* to the tribe, the spirit of adherence, and abidance to the Sheikhs who represent the traditional authority in the tribal community.

The tribal principles are static, unchangeable which enforces the pride of the tribal identity as age old, thus, *asabiyah* to the tribe is the practical continuum of *badawa*. On the other hand, urban societies are the centre of statism, modernity and law where the loyalty of urbanites is for the state. Since the city is the centre of development and urbanism, the societal values, and lifestyle tend to be dynamic and diverse to respond to the developmental transformations brought by progress and updated legislations. Al-Wardi believes that Iraqi people still live by and under these two counteractive social systems; *hadara* and *badawa*, explaining the inverse relationship between statism and Bedouin standards:

In some socio-historical moments of Iraqi history, Bedouin values dominate the social scene, and in others they retreat, mainly depending on whether the state is strong and effective or not. The state is a face of modernity and civilization. Once the state is central, it can easily subdue internal conflicts and enforce security, thus, the industrial, and agricultural sectors will evolve, and urban cities develop accordingly [...] The Bedouin values wane, and are replaced by civilised manifestations based on docility and professionalism. But Iraqi history also witnessed times when the state was so vulnerable that it failed to protect people and belonging. Correspondingly, people start embracing the Bedouin and tribal codes as they offer some order as long as the state is weak. (1965:13)

For Al-Wardi, the rise of traditional authorities, exemplified by the tribal and sectarian entities, means decentralisation of the state. The absence of a strong state means the vacuum of law and sovereignty, thus, the rise of Bedouin *asabiyah* to which Al-Wardi attributed the struggle to establish a democratic political system in Iraq, and the development of an Iraqi cohesive identity (Khouri 2018:97). Having this backdrop in mind, Al-Wardi's conclusion identified the المد و الجزر of tribalism and confessionalism as a perpetuating phenomenon in Iraq, positioning the state as the only legitimate sovereign that is able to supersede communal affinities and redirect them to unified and cohesive statal citizenship.

In Application

Al-Wardi's conclusion 60 years ago is still relevant to the recent political crisis in Iraq. Several Iraqi activists, journalists and political analysts started to use the term *Al-Ladawla* in reference to the Iraqi state despite the fact that Iraqi successive governments post 2003 came through a democratic process based on national elections, granting the quota systems for minority groups, and women. However, acknowledging Iraqi plurality came through constitutionalising communal divisions, thus, institutionalising ethno-confessional identities. This divisive system rapidly politicised sub-identities- ethnic and sectarian, shifting the centrality of the state into multiple fragmented centres of political parties who are supported by armed tribal and confessional forces. The contemporary Iraqi state is a hybrid state, or a decentralised state, that exists by the patronage of tribal bodies and sectarian institutions. Neo-tribalism has been institutionalised and weaponized by the state itself to maintain its existence, creating a cyclical independence between tribal power and the political parties. In 2008, the former PM Nuri Al-Maleki created The Tribal Council (*Majlis Al-Isnad*) mainly from the Shi'a sect, helping the emergence of a new social strata - the 'New Shaykhs'. Al-Majlis was created to support Al-Maleki's government in providing security assistance, and helping to solve social problems. Although tribalization policy is not new to the Iraqi polity, *Majlis Al-Isnad* was created with new strategies; first, it was located inside urban cities, rather than rural areas, including Baghdad and other city centres of the south provinces; second, it was an exclusionary tactic as it included Shi'a tribes only. The rising force of tribalism not only replaced the statal domestic sovereignty, rather, it restructured the societal order of urban and rural spaces, centralising *al-asabiyha* to the tribe as the source of law and justice in a fragile country.

An Issue to be aware of

Several contemporary Iraqi sociologists still go back to Al-Wardi's hypothesis of المد و الجزر to understand neo-tribalism in Iraq post 2003, claiming that his views about the rise of tribalism proved valid in the Iraqi context. It is still important to highlight that we do not know how Al-Wardi would interpret the Iraqi neo-sheikh's phenomenon today in relation to the regional influence and international intervention. Having in mind that Al-Wardi was an advocate of secularity and democracy, what would be his sociological understanding of Iraqi society under the influence of identity crisis and existential struggle among sectarian, political, and ethnic powers. One of the significant differences that took place in reviving the traditional authority of the tribe post 2003 was that this power no longer functions in peripheries while the central state controls city centres. Rather, sheikhs of tribes, sunni and shi'a, are mostly orchestrating life in urban cities, existing on the circular narrative of state's vacuum, and the institutionalisation of identity fragmentation.

Al-Wardi's social theory of المد و الجزر revived itself in the 21st century in Iraq, raising many questions about the perpetuity of *badawa-hadara* conflict that maintains its existence from politicising the multiplicity of the Iraqi national identity rather than absorbing it and reducing its relevance to the public good.

Al-Wardi's works can be found on Good Read: <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/ali-alwardi>

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Doreen Massey

Javier Bordon Osorio

“Conceptualising space as open, multiple, and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics.” (Massey 2005, 59).

Doreen Massey’s work is extraordinarily incisive, perhaps even revolutionary, for many reasons. Her entire career was marked by a comfortable liminality (no spatial pun intended) between research and activism; between being an academic intellectual and a political practitioner. She left behind an extensive bibliography whereby geographical and spatial thought could not be dissociated from broader processes and radical questions. As a critical Marxist and feminist, economy was a constant feature in her analyses and reflections, but never at the expense of the superstructure: identity, gender and culture; matters of ontology and epistemology; and ultimately, the questioning of the social and the political, were as important for her understanding of the spatial as the relations and modes of production that Marxist geographers more typically resort to. More than anything else, Massey was concerned with the study and exposure of power. Yet her critique would not stop there. She convincingly managed to challenge our deepest assumptions within fundamental concepts (space, place, globalisation), re-think their nature, and offer an alternative notion of human existence grounded in relations instead of boundaries; in dynamic co-existence rather than static isolation. A view of the world and its making that celebrates being more considerate to each other.

Intellectual Context

Born in 1944, Doreen Massey grew up in Manchester, England. The experience of lived space, or as she would probably prefer to say, lived space-time, during her childhood had a formative effect in the kind of researcher and activist she would later become. Her family lived in the council estate of Wythenshawe, one of the new urbanising projects afforded by the emerging social welfare state in the UK. Aware of her working-class background and the opportunities that redistributive politics made available to her, Massey did not take long to sympathise with leftist ideologies and develop a genuine interest for sociospatial inequalities (AAG 2016). Given a self-situatedness located in multiple and concatenated ‘peripheries’, it is hardly surprising how this permeated into her work on de-industrialising regions, the North-South divide in England, or the systematic neglect of the many failures that make possible London’s story of success.

After graduating from Oxford University, Massey secured a research position at the Labour-founded Centre for Environmental Studies (CES). There she focused her line of enquiry on the economic geography of different inner cities and regions across the country with the goal to inform policy-making in urban planning and economic development. These early years were instrumental for the formation of ideas that would later underpin much of her work, namely the constitutive relationships that exist between places, the concerted efforts to conceal them by those in power, and the non-neutrality of theory.

With the arrival of Margaret Thatcher to the government in 1979 and the subsequent shutdown of the CES, the geographer started working at The Open University, where she would stay until retirement. Like with many other decisions throughout her life, The Open University represented an opportunity to practice the values of socioeconomic justice and political inclusiveness that her research and activism predicated upon. Since then, Massey embarked upon a complex and ambitious research agenda where the main questions and theoretical outputs are worked and re-worked, sometimes set aside for a while just to be taken up later, in an incessant effort to explore their possible ramifications and depth. Globalisation, gender, place, race, labour...Massey was capable of masterfully drawing the intersections amongst apparently disparate topics through the common dimension of space. In doing so, she would direct criticism towards other prominent thinkers in the field, like David Harvey and Edward Soja. On the one hand, taking issue with their excessive emphasis on the economic component of power relations (Featherstone 2016). On the other hand, for their inattentiveness to other pathways with potential to re-imagine those relations that, although may seem to disregard the materiality of power preferred by these radical geographers, in reality, have much to do with material practice and interaction. For Massey, this is one of the implications when feminist critique is taken seriously (1994, 213).

Research interest and political engagement took her to many places, especially in America and Europe. From spending time in the Sandinista Nicaragua, to having Venezuela's Hugo Chávez to adopt one of her key concepts (i.e., power geometry) as one of the central tenets of the Bolivarian Revolution (Meegan 2017, 1289), Massey was well-known for supporting counter-hegemonic projects to global capitalism. Such engagements also brought her to Greece and Spain, where she enthusiastically promoted the bottom-up political participation that the leftist movements emerging after the 2008 financial crisis seemed to have made room for. Before that, she had been involved in discussions about gender in post-apartheid South Africa. Notwithstanding all these international encounters, the bulk of Massey's empirical work and critique were reserved for the UK. Her country of origin, with all its divisions and inequalities, its multiplicity of individual and collective trajectories merging the global and the local against the backdrop of the financialization of the economy, was at the centre of the theoretical and conceptual articulations that Massey sought to put to test and refine. If the most abhorrent contradictions of neoliberal capitalism were to be found somewhere, so as to expose the mechanisms that sustain its dispossessing hegemony, Massey would seem to tell us that we need to start from its 'core', to then unpack the spatiality constitutive of all the resulting relations. Relations that are filled with power.

Key Argument(s)

I am inclined to think the best way of grasping Massey's contribution is starting from its culmination, arguably encapsulated in the book *For Space* (2005). Contrary to what the title may suggest, the monograph's aim is not to make the case for the advantages of the so-called 'spatial turn' in the social sciences that scholars had been insisting on for years before her. Massey's thinking breaks away from binary oppositions. Space is not more important than time, or vice versa. Both space and time are equally important for different reasons; they both are integral for the possibility of existence of society and politics, and crucially, they are implicated in each other. This relational and processual understanding of reality is key for her arguments vindicating a similar notion of space, an approach to research that focuses on connections rather than discrete units and categories, and the need for a progressive politics of responsibility.

“Space is the product of interrelations” (Massey 2005, 9) is one of the opening statements that challenges conventional assumptions about power and identity and unlocks the spatial as a necessary condition for multiplicity and change. In this relational thinking, identities (whether of states, communities, or individuals) and their interactions create space, while the spatial configurations that exist at a given time and place shape those identities. As relations are generally traversed with power asymmetries, economic unevenness, and/or cultural difference, the resulting ways in which agents imagine (and experience) their position in space and the ensuing struggles for dominance and resistance condition their identity and how politics operate. But Massey’s space is not self-replicating, rather it is in constant flux. Since practices and relations are always under construction and open to change, so is space; and since space is the parameter that enables the existence of multiple identities/entities with their own -yet interrelated- temporal trajectories, it is the necessary dimension for the existence of relations, and thus of politics. This radical re-thinking of space has profound implications for the ways we think about modernity, the nation, or the concept of place. Instead of associating these terms to bounded spaces or processes of territorialisation that create ‘authentic’ identities, enclosed cultures, and separate societies (i.e., the pre-conditions for the ‘us vs. them’ imagination), Massey forces us to acknowledge their multiplicities, fractures and dynamism (2005, 64).

Such discontinuous, heterogenous, and open-ended approach to space is best illustrated in her defence of “a global sense of place” (Massey 1994). Places contain multiple identities and fluid boundaries that are open to contestation. We tend to give fixity and clear boundaries to place, but these are futile attempts to stabilise the ever-changing co-constitution between space and time. Places are, indeed, specific as a result of unique social relations. However, relations are dynamic and, more importantly, stretch beyond interactions ‘internal’ to that place. This is why, for Massey, the contemporary dilemma is not between endorsing a process of globalisation that allegedly erodes modern conceptions of space or retreating to localisms and nationalisms that reject ‘foreign’ influence. Places have never been completely isolated from one another; hence the real challenge is how to turn those relations more equal and inclusive. Her widely used concept of ‘power-geometry’ depicts the positions of privilege and subordination that agents, whether individual or collective, take in uneven spatial orders. In line with her consistent call for relationality, Massey uncovers how structural conditions (e.g., unequal distribution of resources) is not the only factor that constrains human agency, but the active spatial practices (i.e., how the powerful organise space, use it, move across it) of those in positions of dominance are equally important.

In Application

The ample range of topics and the manifold scales and directionalities found in Massey’s treatment of space have elicited some interest across disciplinary fields studying the Middle East. Sometimes adopting the more encompassing aspects of her relational theory, while others resorting to specific arguments and observations to single out issues around gender, the body, or the city, the scholarship on the Middle East shows a degree of variability in its theoretical engagement with Massey’s work. This leaves great scope for integrating her more ground-breaking theoretical contributions into research avenues that have kept Middle East scholars busy for quite some time -and potentially into new ones.

Urban planning, urbanisation, and the rise of ‘global cities’ in the region has led a number of scholars to use Massey’s insights concerned with the relationship between neoliberal strategies, identity and the urban space. Examples of transformative projects in Dubai (Barnes 2013) or Casablanca (Bogaert 2015) put to test the interplay between modernity and tradition and reveal the processes of accumulation and

dispossession associated with particular practices in producing the city. Following Massey, these authors introduce much needed nuance to the misconception of globalisation as an unstoppable force while assigning weight to local strategies in urbanising projects, which, in turn, stimulates debates over responsibility (Kahn 2012, 26). Another spatial scale where Massey has been instrumental is the body (Brister 2014; Hasso and Salime 2016). Gendered bodies become sites of meaning for normative conceptions of social mobility, economic opportunity, and political order. Massey found clear associations between the global as the site of activity, movement, and masculinity; whereas the local as signifying ideas of passivity, immobility, and femininity. Others have noted how power-geometries of mobility and immobility are transposed into wider scales, from the body to the region (El-Hibri 2017).

Attempts to integrate relations and interactions within and across levels of analysis have benefited from engagements with the ‘global sense of place’ in studies of protests and activism (Gregory 2013), or from Massey’s ideas of scalar nesting in processes of space-making (Ferabolli 2021). Due to the interconnected and transversal nature of a good deal of Middle East politics, where “the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny” (Massey 2005, 9) coalesce in complex ways to shape processes imbued with power, identity and order, relational and open-ended understandings of space are long overdue. Mabon’s forthcoming book (2023) is a good example of this, where Massey’s approach to the spatial is used to study the interplay between domestic and regional politics through the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Massey also figures prominently in my own work. Her ways of thinking about space, relations, identity, and place are proving to be instructive in my exploration of interlocking securitisation processes around the Muslim Brotherhood in the region.

Conclusion

Doreen Massey persevered in ensuring her academic work and political activism supported each other towards the kind of changes she wanted to see in the world. She convincingly re-imagined space in order to re-centre it as a collective enterprise, eliciting reflection on our own practices and awareness of how we relate to others. The study of the Middle East can gain much from Massey’s dynamic and multiple space, whether to examine processes that advance inclusiveness, plurality and participation in space, or those that try to negate it.

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SUSAN STRANGE

Sukru Cildir

Susan Strange was born in Dorset in 1923 and passed away in 1998. A founding figure of International Political Economy in the UK, Strange received a Bachelor's degree in Economics from the LSE in 1943. Following her graduation, she worked in journalism for around 20 years, initially at *The Economist*, before spells at *The Observer*, in the White House, and at the UN. Strange later held a range of academic posts in the UK, Italy and Japan, including Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at LSE in 1978-1988 (Brown, 1999, pp. 531–535).

There is little doubt that her years in journalism were absolutely important to shape Strange's world view and academic positionality. However, it was the years of 1965-76 when she was a researcher at Chatham House where key works *Sterling and British Policy* and *International Monetary Relations* were published. For her, there was a void between economics and politics. Accordingly, neither Economics nor International Relations (IR) had sufficient research agenda to understand the contemporary international political economy. While traditional economists did not consider the reality of power and instead focused on abstract theories of Economics, IR scholars couldn't go beyond of state and military power (Tooze, 2000, p.284). There was a need of a more plausible and integrated approach to understand international economic relations that experienced fundamental changes in the contemporary period. This approach would constitute a middle ground between political and economic analyses and conclude 'a dialogue of the deaf' between them (Cohen, 2007, p.208). This concern is particularly evident across her most influential articles (Strange, 1970) and became the core of other writings on international relations.

As an experienced journalist and a latecomer to academia, she was against convoluted theoretical debates and committed herself to "making academic writings accessible and free from jargon" (Tooze and May, 2000, p. 4). She preferred simplicity and efficient expression in order to reach a wider audience. This was not merely a preference or an individual style for her, but the social responsibility of an academic to communicate with and share their knowledge with as many people as possible (Ibid).

Although it is possible to portray her as an empiricist, this is misguided and hides an interest in theoretically informed empirical research (Palan, 1999, p.123). She opposed law-like generalisations and didn't like 'grand theory', but insisted on 'grounding theory', "most importantly in a detailed knowledge of particular sectors of international political economy" (Tooze and May, 2002, p. 2).

Key arguments

Although Strange is largely regarded as a scholar in IPE, her analyses are also quite helpful for understanding global politics. In that sense, the question of *who benefits* (*cui bono?*) which features prominently in her work helps us to understand the nature of international system, and whose benefits are mostly served by the existing rules, norms and regimes in global politics. To understand *who benefits*, we actually look at “where power lies and how this influences outcomes” (May, 1996, p.173). For her, there are two types of power: relational power and structural power. Whilst relational power refers to the physical and material capabilities that can be measured and estimated, structural power refers to “shape and determine the structures of the global political economy [or international system]²⁵ within which other states, their political institutions, and their economic enterprises and (not least) their scientists and other professional people have to operate” (Strange, 1988, p.24). Structural power provides a framework for the actors of the international system to regulate their relations and understand when, why, how and by whom the key decisions regarding international order are taken.

For Strange, structural power emerges across a quadrangle of linkages among four major global structures, namely: production, security, finance and knowledge. She resembles them to four columns of a pyramid and notes that there is a quadrangle linkage among those four structures. Strange emphasizes that none of the structures is more important than the others and they have differing weights over the structural power of an actor (May, 1996, p.178). She also adds that there is a very close relations between structural power and relational power. Accordingly, structural power forms the four major global structures in a way in which material relations are influenced and regulated to the advantage of an actor who bears the structural power. In return, the emerging material advantage fortifies its structural power (May, 1996). So, structural power means more than relational power and actually corresponds to an ability of an actor to shape the international arena by determining the rules of the game, setting up agenda of possibilities and deciding what should be possible/plausible for other actors as well as its growing dominance at relational power components (Strange, 1988; May, 1996; Tooze and May, 2002).

Strange’s purpose here was to bring an analysis of power to international economics, applied to highlight the extent of US in the process (May, 1996, p.178). In production structure, the US has been the preeminent actor in the world with its largest GDP, leading companies in oil, computing, aviation industries and its ability of what shall be produced, by whom, under what conditions and how. In security structure, it has been the leading state which provides ‘safety of realm’ for the global order with its unprecedented military forces “on land, at sea, in the air and (most markedly) in space” (Strange, 1987, p.566). In finance, the US has been the dominant actor with its global reserve currency (the US Dollar), its influence on credit creation, global financial transactions, especially through SWIFT. In knowledge, the US is the principle country in the world with its largest share in global research and development, its influence and control over what is believed, what is known, and their communication systems along with its global agenda setting power (Strange, 1988).

In application

²⁵ I added ‘the international system’.

The concepts and approaches developed by Susan Strange provide useful tools to explain and understand the (international) politics in the Middle East. Her approach to international political economy helps us to understand the main characteristics of the international system in which Middle Eastern actors to operate. In my PhD study, I applied her structural power concept to explain how the US structural power shaped the international context where Saudi Arabia and Iran used oil in their bilateral relations between 1990 and 2020 along with Historical Sociology (Cildir, 2021).

Additionally, there are a number of other studies that use similar approaches to Strange, without necessarily using her ideas of structural power. For instance, Simon Bromley's seminal text on American hegemony and world oil and argued that the US had the directive role in international oil industry and its power depends on the stability in the Gulf (Bromley, 1991). Similarly, Doug Stokes and Sam Raphael examined the relations between the US military dominance in oil rich areas including Middle East and its enduring global power (Stokes and Raphael, 2010). However, M. Fatih Tayfur directly applied Strange's IPE approach to analyse Turkish-Greek relations in the Eastern Mediterranean to have an alternative explanation of the relations (Tayfur, 2003).

As long as oil is the most popular energy resource around the world with its largest share (over 30% since the mid-1960s) in global energy consumption and the Middle East plays a crucial role in global oil politics with its abundant oil reserves, Susan Strange's theory of structural power can be an insightful theoretical framework for future studies concerning the international relations and political economy in the Middle East. As states as being the most important actors in international relations locate at the crossroads between domestic and international politics and undertake their decisions by omni-balancing between internal and external pressures, international context should not be ignored in analyses concerning political economy, politics and international relations (Saouli, 2012, p.5; Nonneman, 2003).

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Wael Hallaq

Ali Seyedrazaghi

Wael Hallaq, a professor of ethics, law, and political thought at Columbia University, is considered one of the most important contemporary thinkers in the field of Islamic studies. His work began with the study of Islamic Shari'a and has developed with his research on the problematic epistemic ruptures generated by the onset of modernity. As the defining emblem of Islamic civilization, Shari'a is one of the most central - if not the most central - phenomena that has played a prominent role in the formation and development of the Islamic episteme and the production of an Islamic version of the moral subject for more than a thousand years.

Intellectual Context

The centrality of Shari'a allows Hallaq to be engaged with a wide range of debates and controversy that exist in Islamic studies, and to gradually establish his place among the few influential people in this field. Emphasizing the hegemony of Islamic Shari'a in connection with the other two characteristics of this phenomenon will help us to better conceptualize Hallaq's intellectual project and the fundamental reasons that help him to be at the center of Islamic studies. First, Islamic Shari'a has played a prominent role in shaping, developing, and continuously regulating the material structures that have existed in Islamic civilization and in a vast geography from East Asia to the Balkans. The hegemony of Shari'a on structures such as government, economy and education helps Hallaq to conceptualize Shari'a beyond a discipline related to divine command and in interaction with the emergence, continuity, and decline of specific structures that had been at the center of Islamic civilization. This gives Hallaq an authoritative position in Islamic studies and allows him to find the opportunity to engage with a wide range of intellectual debates and controversies that exist within this field. Hallaq also makes use of the relation between Shari'a and Islamic material structures in expanding his field of study to the history of collapse of Islamic episteme with the emergence of modernity.

The second point is the hegemonic role of Islamic Shari'a in relation to other disciplines in the Islamic episteme. Shari'a as one of the hegemonic modes of reasoning in Islam and as a system of law that existed in the Islamic society was having various effects on other methods of reasoning and production of knowledge in Islamic civilization, i.e. different disciplines from Kalam and Adab to philosophy and so on. Therefore, all the disciplines in the Islamic society, which sought to build a moral person in different ways, were in one way or another developed in connection with the Shari'a. "The scholars, thinkers, and intellectuals, from East to West of Islamdom, those whom we call ulama, jurists, judges, professors, Sufi Shaykhs, Quran specialists, hadith experts, adab writers, linguists, historians, biographers, traveller-scholars, kalam-theologians, philosophers, astronomers, Tasawwuf philosophers, chemists, vision scientists, logicians, mathematicians, scholars of instruments (technology specialists), and a host of subsidiary others" would eventually engage somehow with Shari'a in order to produce knowledge on their field of studies. In my opinion, this

hegemony of Shari'a over other disciplines is the second factor that should be taken into consideration in examining Hallaq's thought and the conceptualization of his project. The centrality of Shari'a as a discipline eventually places Hallaq at the center of an interdisciplinary interaction in Islamic studies.

The two mentioned factors can be a start for conceptualizing the framework of Hallaq's intellectual project and at the same time explain the centrality of Hallaq's thought in Islamic studies. But it would be a mistake to limit the emergence of Hallaq only to the centrality of Shari'a and its effects on Islamic civilization. The number of people who have studied the Islamic Shari'a in the same situation inside and outside the Islamic societies - for example, in the Orientalist tradition - is countless, but at the same time, none of them except Hallaq have attempted to make this study meaningful in relation to a broader epistemic condition, by starting from the conceptualization of the Islamic Shari'a. On the contrary, many of them - such as orientalists who have been engaged with this tradition to help the development of colonialism, nationalists who attempted to reread the knowledge produced in the Islamic episteme to legitimize their nation-state-building project, reformists who regardless of the different nature of the Islamic project, have reread its body of knowledge with the concepts developed within the liberal tradition, and finally, the Islamists who, regardless of the modern hegemony, have been living with the illusion of the continuity of Islamic knowledge in the modern era - have started studying the body of Islamic knowledge from conceptual frameworks that have expanded outside the episteme or with questions that have emerged outside the structure of this episteme, and each of them has not only misrepresented this body in some way, but also caused the destruction of this episteme from within. Thus, what makes Hallaq different from this spectrum is the conscious commitment to use the conceptual structure of the Islamic episteme in rereading its different parts on the one hand, and the ambitious effort to conceptualize the overall structure of the Islamic project, starting from the relationship of Shari'a with other parts of this episteme and by applying concepts such as episteme, paradigm, and central domain in his intellectual journey on the other hand.

Key Arguments

With this background, we can now better follow Hallaq's intellectual journey during the last few decades. As mentioned, a large part of Hallaq's work has been related to Shari'a and explaining the theoretical relationship between Islamic ethics and Islamic law. Hallaq has not only tried to conceptualize the Islamic project using the centrality of Shari'a but also gradually used this framework to explain the decline of Islamic episteme in relation to the clash with the modern. Hallaq's departure in this direction begins with his book called *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. This book should be considered the beginning of Hallaq's transition from studying Shari'a to the development of Hallaq's intellectual project starting with the field of political theory. In this book and in a comparative study between the Islamic and modern state, Hallaq seeks to show that there is a fundamental contradiction between the modern state and the Islamic project in constructing a moral human being, and for this reason, by any standard, what is called an Islamic state is both impossible and inherently self-contradictory. Therefore, Hallaq's conceptualization of the Islamic episteme and its central project against the modern episteme begins with the study and comparison of political, legal, ethical, and Islamic structures. It is in this framework that Hallaq focuses on what he calls the modern moral predicament by deeply differentiating between Islamic episteme and modern episteme and argues that the modern state structure cannot meet the needs of a Muslim individual due to the lack

of its moral technology of self. Hallaq's argues that basically the Islamic currents that have come to power in countries like Iran or are seeking to come to power in other parts of the Islamic world are not aware of the genealogy of the modern state and its contradiction with the Islamic project of creating a moral subject and for this reason their project is doomed to failure. While this book is somewhat limited to a specific case study on the conflict between the structure of the Islamic state and the Islamic project, the role of this book in the context of the larger intellectual project of Hallaq should be considered as a step to conceptualize the structure of the Islamic episteme, an explanation of the state of epistemic rapture, and finally criticism of modernity. All three of these stages organize the framework of Hallaq's intellectual project.

Hallaq's next book, which covers another part of his intellectual journey, is written in criticism of Said's *Orientalism* where he deepens the critique of Orientalism to deploy it for rethinking the foundations of modernity. Hallaq undertakes several related tasks at the same time in this project. The book begins with a critique of Said's orientalism and his most central concept, misrepresentation. In the first stage, Hallaq argues that Saeed's criticism of Orientalism has ignored its epistemic foundations, and thus limiting Orientalism to misrepresentation and its relation to power is insufficient. Therefore, Hallaq argues that in order to understand the structure of Orientalism, beyond the issue of mis/representation, the real impact of this form of knowledge production in Islamic societies and ultimately its role in the collapse of the Islamic episteme should be in the center of attention. With this approach, Hallaq tries to answer why the language produced in Orientalism should be considered not only misrepresentative but also performative. Therefore, in the first part of his book, Hallaq deals with three specific tasks. First, he argues, Orientalism is an epistemic phenomenon, second, it cannot be reduced to misrepresentation, and finally, it should not be assumed that misrepresenting Islamic knowledge is limited to only one type of relationship between power and knowledge, namely Orientalism. The conceptualization of these three processes helps Hallaq to explain how the structure of the Islamic episteme should be studied outside of modern hegemony, and how the role of epistemic rapture should be taken into consideration in the contradictions that exist in the contemporary situation of Muslims.

Hallaq's vigorous efforts does not end with his book, and he continues presenting that the conceptualization of Orientalism should take place at a deeper level of the relation of power and knowledge, so that Orientalism can be conceptualized as a discipline related to the project of modernity. Refusing to isolate Orientalism, Hallaq suggests that Orientalism should be recognized and be criticised alongside with other modern disciplines from law, economics, and philosophy, to scientific inquiry with their involvement in colonialism, mass annihilation, and systematic destruction of the natural world. Thus, according to Hallaq, the problem is not only with Orientalism, but with the essence of the modern project and its concept of sovereignty which create a certain type of relation between power and knowledge.

While Hallaq's effort before *Restating Orientalism* is focused on explaining the central project of Islamic episteme, identifying its structure, and protecting it by criticizing its re-reading from within modern episteme, Hallaq's next step to complete his project is focused on something that needs to be called reforming modernity. In his last work with the same title, *Reforming Modernity*, Hallaq tries to show that the criticism of modernity should be formed by relying on a moral theory. His last book, which should be read with having such a background in mind and understood within this line of thought, in the engagement with the philosophy of Taha Abdul Rahman deals with the simultaneous criticism of the modern project as well as the many efforts made in the past hundred years in various

formats for the development of Islamic modernity. In this book he tries to demonstrate that the reform of modernity should be based on a specific moral system, and this is an attempt that exists in Taha's philosophy and Hallaq introduces it to the western reader.

In Application

Hallaq's intellectual work is useful in various fields of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies. While Hallaq has clearly been able to conceptualize Sharia as a central phenomenon in Islamic epistemology beyond the framework of Islamic jurisprudence, his main function for students of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies is his attempt to create a coherent understanding of Islamic project by focusing on both material and intellectual tradition of Islam. In this way, Hallaq's work helps anyone in Islamic studies to have a better understanding of Islamic society, as well as the subject that the Islamic project seeks to create. Moreover, Hallaq helps us to understand the complexity of Muslim societies after the epistemic ruptures generated by the emergence of modernity. One also needs to be aware that Hallaq's work is not only pathological but he also plants seeds in the minds of people engaged with his intellectual journey, in order to start finding solutions for the problems of the Islamic societies, and to use the Islamic intellectual tradition to engage with the modern crises of the world.

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Sara Ahmed

Konstantin Rintelmann

In 2009, Margrit Shildrick panegyrically wrote: “Few academic writers working in the UK context today can match Sara Ahmed in her prolific output, and fewer still can maintain the consistently high level of her theoretical explorations” (Shildrick, 2009). Yet, in mid-2016, after twenty years in academia and more than a hundred publications—of which ten are single-authored books—Sara Ahmed resigned from all of her academic posts when various students at Goldsmiths reported incidents of sexual harassment: “Resigning was speaking out. It was saying: this is serious enough that I have had enough. Resigning was also a feminist hearing. [...] A feminist ear can be how you hear what is not being heard” (Ahmed, 2022).

Intellectual Context

“We need to recognize sexual harassment as an institutional problem as well as a means through which the academy itself becomes available only to some. Sexual harassment is an access issue; it is a social justice issue” (*Feministkilljoys*, 2022). While one cannot do justice to Ahmed’s rich and incredibly diverse work by attempting to distill it into a single essence, the last sentence might be exemplary: Intersectionality is pivotal to the self-professed ‘feminist killjoy’, who often blurs the line between scholarship and activism (Ibid). “I am not a lesbian one moment and a person of color the next and a feminist at another. I am all of these at every moment. And lesbian feminism of color brings this all into existence, with insistence, with persistence” (Ahmed, 2017: 230). Born in Salford, England, to a Pakistani father and an English mother, young Ahmed relocated with her parents to Adelaide, Australia, in the early 1970s. Central themes in her work—such as migration, (dis)orientation, otherness, and hybrid identities—echo her experiences of being framed as ‘strange’ or ‘different’ growing up as a biracial woman in the West (Radics, 2016).

Autobiographic anecdotes featured prominently in her first book entitled “*Differences that Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism*”, which was published after she completed her doctoral research at the *Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory* at Cardiff University. Delving into the works of Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Lacan, and Lyotard and reviewing disciplines such as film theory, semiotics, ethics, legal discourses, and body rights, Ahmed expounds that postmodern and feminist theory must be approached as *doing something* rather than merely *being something* (Ahmed, 1998). In “*Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*”, Ahmed bares the roots of globalization and mobility as new formative constituents of subjectivity and communality, identifying materiality, discursive histories, and power relations as enablers and preventers for global encounters (2000a).

Drawing on Marx's *commodity fetishism*, she introduces the concept of *stranger fetishism*—the subtle modes through which various forms of racialization and othering socially construct strangers: “The stranger here is not somebody we do not recognize, but somebody that we recognize as a stranger, somebody we know as not knowing, rather than somebody we simply do not know. The stranger is produced as an object of knowledge, rather than coming into being in an absence of knowledge” (Ahmed, 2000b).

Theoretical Contributions

Ahmed's *magnum opus*, “*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*”, explores the social realm and circulation of emotions and is recognized as a landmark text in the field of *affect theory*—a discipline that attempts to ontologize *affects*; that is, to bring outward expressions of feelings, emotions and other nonlinguistic forces into categories to typify their socio-biological function. Created by psychologist Silvan Tomkins, the concept of *affectivity* initially denoted the “biological portion of emotion”, defined as the “hard-wired, preprogrammed, genetically transmitted mechanisms that exist in each of us” which, when stimulated, actuate a “known pattern of biological events” (Nathanson, 1992). Ahmed, like other critical theorists, contends that *affects* and emotions are internalized cultural practices rather than universal categories of primordial bio-psychological states (Riedner, 2014). As practices, emotions are material rhetoric; they hold agentic power, command modes of living, and act as gateways into the socio-material world. Drawing on Marxist theory, *critical affect theory* thus holds that emotions are embedded in a more extensive and emissive material and discursive substrate of disciplinary structures that reflect the hegemonic imprints of modernity, coloniality, the nation-state, and capitalist modes of production (Quintana, 2022; Da Costa, 2016; Berlant, 2011).

Naturally, this hegemony operates within a spatial environment whereby “the strangers come to be seen as figures (with linguistic and bodily integrity) when they have entered the spaces we call home” (Ahmed, 2000b). Here, ‘our homes’ can take the shape of various forms and levels of spatiality in which social relations unfold, such as a neighborhood (as we will see later), a sports club, or a state. It is against the backdrop of these ‘disciplinary homes’ that Ahmed’s attention to the intersection of feminist, queer, race, and postcolonial studies finds traction. Drawing on these disciplines, as well as Marxist cultural studies and poststructuralist theories of language, Ahmed's inquiry traces how emotions bestow bodies with value and ideologies. The cultural politics of emotion operate on the surfaces of bodies and fashion social relationships that designate the rhetorical terrain and their “boundaries that are lived as worlds” (Ahmed, 2000a). In other words, *affects* act as sorting procedures that either align bodies with communities or exile them—a process that negatively affects minoritized groups disproportionately. In short, Ahmed focuses her inquiry on the questions of what it means to be a body in society, how different bodies are interpreted, and how bodily traits are used to structure society.

In Practice

As insinuated at the outset, there is no way to do justice to the cornucopia of stimulating and seminal contributions Sara Ahmed has contributed. As such, this concluding part focuses on key areas of SEPAD's scholarly inquiry.

To begin with, *affect theory* can help us to push back against primordialist readings of confessional identities. For example, in popular discourse—if not anti-Muslim speech and Islamist auto-Orientalizing agendas—certain notions still equate 'Islam' with an agentic institution, a computer program executed by the digital code of the Qur'ān at which end we find '*homo islamicus*' (Tibi, 1984). Needless to say, these myopic 'analyses' blatantly overlook the multiplicity of modes through which living bodies extrapolate meaning from sacred scriptures; that is, in conversation with other traditions, other histories, other localities, and simply other priorities and emotions—a rather obvious reality that is summarized by Andrew Rippin, who described *tafsīr*—that is Qur'ānic hermeneutics—as “the humanization of the divine word and the divinization of the human spirit” (1998: 177). To some extent, these misperceptions might be rooted in western Protestant traditions of *sola scriptura*, the notion of the primacy of text, and that scripture charters institutions and legislates bodies. As Donovan Schaefer aptly condenses it: “Bodies do things with texts; texts do not dictate to bodies” (2013). Nevertheless, ill-informed analyses continue to plague scholarship on sectarian relations in more subtle ways, often when they take 'sect' as a *fait accompli* unit of analysis (Majed, 2020).

There are certainly more critical approaches to mark out where Ahmed's deliberations offer food for thought: Adumbrating the silhouettes of Heideggerian phenomenology, Ahmed reasons that emotions are relational; we do not have emotions, but emotions are formed through contact with the outside world, other beings, and things such as images and representations, their past histories, and their future directionality (Horrikan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling, 2016). It is the contingency of interaction and the interplay of sociality, spatiality, and temporality that allows *affect* to become an object and, in turn, to produce meaning. These realms have to be taken into the equation of sectarian relations, too. For example, Fanar Haddad pointed out how sectarian competition cannot properly be understood without the advent of the nation-state, as this new political framework raised political, social, and economic questions of ownership, entitlement, and belonging—issues that synergized with preexisting sectarian identities that previously were confined to community-centric religious praxis or neighborhood rivalries (2019). These questions of 'national truths', as Haddad termed it, played a vital role in the sectarianization process of Iraq, as Shi'a-centric state building disenfranchised large segments of the Sunni population, setting in motion a downward spiral of contestation (2018). Here, the state became the 'home' for some that claimed to own exclusive ownership rights, enforcing homogenizing disciplining measures.

But how can we turn the study of sectarian relations to one of Ahmed's main objects of interest, that is, bodies? Drawing on my own fieldwork, an activist from Baghdad made these comments regarding the demographic changes occurring in his neighborhood *al-Sha'ab* following the 2003 invasion:

“I could feel the demographic change in my neighborhood; it was like a day-and-night difference. I could see that people were forced to migrate, and it was obvious that the new arrivals were all Shī’a. Not only because of how they dressed or spoke but also because of the flags and portraits of Imams that suddenly appeared everywhere.”²⁶

When I inquired about his first remark, he elaborated further:

“You could tell that most arrivals came from the Marshlands. When you hear them talk, you wonder: ‘Is this even Arabic or what?’ [*laughs*] These people have stayed in the same place for thousands of years; they have never migrated to other cities within Iraq, so you can quickly spot them in Baghdad; their accent, their clothes, their hair, their skin, and the food they eat—this is all very distinct.”

When I asked him about his sectarian affiliation, he responded:

“You hear the name of our tribe and think we are Shī’a from the south, but we are mainly Sunnis with a Baghdadi lifestyle—because of my grandfather, who converted to Sunnism when he moved to Baghdad sometime during the 1930s or 40s. Naturally, people feel confused about our family, but so was I. There are pictures of my mom and aunts wearing short skirts above the knees, but in the same photos is my grandmother wearing a traditional southern outfit, a Chādor—which is so weird, like: ‘Okay guys, what are we? Are we progressive? Are we conservative? Are we Sunnah? Are we Shī’a?’ But if you are still in a position where you are confused about your own family, you confuse everyone else—and that means that people will avoid you because they can’t read you. They need to know if you are Arab or Kurdish, Sunni or Shī’a and which tribe you are from. So, when you are confusing everybody, you are not secure—because people around you feel not secure. It is a bizarre and uncomfortable feeling; you don’t feel safe.”

Regarding the study of sectarian relations, ample attention has been given to semiotics, institutions, conflicting rituality, eschatologies, symbolisms, and mythologies. However, experiences like the one above demonstrate that sectarian relations, at least at the micro-level, are often negotiated and regulated through interactions of nonverbal, cognitive assessments of bodies. It is the importance of the immediacy and intimacy of these encounters Sara Ahmed sensitizes us for: “The ‘moment of contact’ is shaped by past histories of contact, which allows the proximity of a racial other to be perceived as threatening, at the same time as it re-shapes the bodies in the contact zone of the encounter” (2004: 25). Although sectarian affiliation does not strictly entail phenotypic features, the ‘reading of the other’ without asking direct questions was a common practice lamented by many interviewees. In fact, many stressed how asking about someone’s confessional identity or even talking about ‘sectarianism’ has been a strict societal taboo in Iraq for years. Besides well-reported incidents

²⁶ Interview with one of the founding members of the Baghdad-based group ‘Workers against Sectarianism’, 2022.

such as the growing or shaving beards, changing names, or being sanctioned for expressing emotions on sect-specific holidays, one can only speculate about the reshaping of bodies in these ‘sectarian encounters’—leaving room for much-needed research (Tawji, 2022; Bassem, 2022; Shafaqna, 2019).

The interviewee's experience hints at *ontological insecurity*. Popularized by sociologist Anthony Giddens, the term refers to a sense of order and continuity in regard to an individual's experiences; it is sustained by crafting narratives that ground a sense of identity and impart a sense of temporal continuity and internal unity. Meaning is thus found in experiencing positive and stable emotions while avoiding disorder and anxiety (Giddens, 1991). A substantial amount of scholarship that deals with ontological security, or rather *insecurity*, involves homelessness (Rosenberg, et al, 2021; Stonehouse, Threlkeld and Theobald, 2021; Padgett, 2007). In a fascinating terminological overlap with Ahmed's conceptualization of ‘home’, one of the most haunting slogans of the Iraqi Tishrīn movement has been ‘*nurīd waṭan!*’—‘we want a homeland!’ (Ali, 2019). One could thus hypothesize that the inner tensions that accrue from a sect-centric environment that systematically exposes bodies to ‘disciplining insecurity’—not only ontologically but also quite physically (Nadeem, 2022)—is the driving force behind a bottom-up form of de-sectarianization: Iraqis feel estranged from their own home but are therefore now more determined than ever to reclaim ownership—to find shelter, that is, security. Cynically, however, as sectarian rhetoric has lost its mobilization potential in Iraq, the bodies of other minoritized groups appear to have become targeted: What should be read as a publicity stunt to stimulate and monopolize trans-sectarian mobilization from across the conservative Islamist spectrum, Muqtadā al-Ṣadr recently announced to “combat the LGBTQ community” (Sewell and Khalil, 2022). The self-proclaimed ‘house owner’ intends to harmonize and homogenize the ‘occupants’ by disciplining, silencing, or expelling ‘the stranger’. As a queer university student from Najaf told the *Independent*: Despite not being openly LGBTQ, they have been frequently harassed in the street for wearing clothes in colors and styles that do not fit local conservative norms (Ibid).

Concluding Remarks

Our bodies are the closest and most intimate substrate for our emotions and identities. Through Sara Ahmed's work, we ought to ask ourselves: What are emotions and identities worth—or are they even ‘real’—if we cannot express and parade them through our bodies? Our focus should then be on who or what regulates, suppresses, or negates bodies and why—whether these are disciplinary regimes or mainstream societies. Since we are all part of the latter in one form or another, we should, therefore, critically reflect on our own positionality—continuously. We owe it to the people around us who, for too long, have been either silenced or rendered invisible.

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bell hooks

Ruba Ali Al-Hassani

Now when I ponder the silences, the voices that are not heard, the voices of those wounded and/or oppressed individuals who do not speak or write, I contemplate the acts of persecution, torture—the terrorism that breaks spirits, that makes creativity impossible. I write these words to bear witness to the primacy of resistance struggle in any situation of domination (even within family life); to the strength and power that emerges from sustained resistance and the profound conviction that these forces can be healing, can protect us from dehumanisation and despair (hooks 1986).

In her long legacy of written work and teaching, bell hooks believed that the act of speech, of ‘talking back’, was not a mere gesture of empty words or posturing, rather the expression of one’s movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. Agency was crucial to how one led their life and assisted others towards self-determination. This was reflected in every aspect of her life, including her own pen name.

Scholar and activist Gloria Jean Watkins was born in September 1952 in Kentucky, United States of America. She grew up in a segregated community of the American south, educated in racially segregated public schools, and later moved to an integrated school in the late 1960s. A gifted child, she enjoyed the poetry of William Wordsworth, Langston Hughes, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Gwendolyn Brooks. At age 19, she began writing what would become her first full-length book, *Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, which was published in 1981. In this ground-breaking book, she grounded her feminist theory in the struggles of Black women, highlighting the wounds of Black female slavery and how they affect Black women in the present. With a scholarship, she studied English literature at Stanford University, then earned a Master of Arts at the University of Wisconsin and a Ph.D. at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her doctoral dissertation on Toni Morrison was titled, *Keeping a Hold on Life: Reading Toni Morrison’s Fiction*. She taught English and ethnic studies at the University of Southern California from the mid-1970s, African and Afro-American studies at Yale University during the 1980s, women’s studies at Oberlin College, and English at the City College of New York during the 1990s and early 2000s. In 2004, she became a professor in residence at Berea College in Kentucky where she founded the bell hooks Institute in 2014. She passed away in December 2021. She leaves behind a long legacy of prolific work, having published forty books which have been translated into fifteen languages, reaching a global Black diaspora with her messages of resistance, feminist revolution, and love (Froio 2021).

When the feminist movement was at its zenith in the late 1960 and early 1970s, there was a move away from the idea of the person with a greater focus on the person's contributions. Among many who took the name of their female ancestors, Watkins assumed her great-grandmother's name as her own pseudonym or pen name to honour her and to debunk the notion that she—Gloria Jean Watkins—was a unique and exceptional woman, rather a product of the women before her (Lowens 2018). The unconventional lower-casing of the name was part and parcel of this shedding of her ego in a strive for a greater struggle that she found not only personal, but political. The fine line between the personal and political was central to her long legacy of work.

Intellectual Context

hooks wrote on a wide range of topics that were rooted in gender, African-American resistance, pedagogy, and entertainment media. When asked about this, she replied, 'I think part of Western metaphysical dualism is, we're always being asked to choose one over the other. I'm lucky. I think it's good that I have a body of work that addresses different things in different ways' (Lowens 2018). hooks wrote in simple prose with the goal of reaching a wide audience and making knowledge accessible to all, especially Black women in the U.S. and beyond who were often denied access to higher education. She continuously challenged a system of academic writing that historically belittled and ignored the work of Black scholars. She eschewed footnotes, refusing the academy's standards, maintained her lowercase name, and wrote in a deeply personal style, often carved from her own experiences (Thompson 2021). While doing so, her ideas were relentlessly rigorous and full of citations.

Greatly influenced by Paulo Freire and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh whom she described as the two 'teachers' who had touched her deeply with their work, hooks believed that pedagogy was everywhere to be found, even in popular culture (hooks 1994). It was Freire's insistence that education could be the practice of freedom, awareness, and engagement in the classroom that encouraged her to create strategies for what he called 'conscientization' (Freire 1972). Translating his term to critical awareness and engagement, hooks entered classrooms with the conviction that active participation was crucial for both educator and student, and that students should not be passive consumers. Influenced by Freire, hooks believed that education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which everyone labours. This notion of labour was affirmed by Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy of engaged Buddhism—the focus on practice in conjunction with contemplation. Here, both Freire and Hanh shared the emphasis on "praxis—action and reflection upon the world in order to change it" (hooks 1994, 14). hooks adopted Hanh's focus on a holistic approach to learning and spiritual practice as it enabled her to overcome years of socialization in both the racial and pedagogical sense.

This socialization had taught her to believe a classroom was diminished if students and professors regarded each other as "'whole" human beings, surviving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world' (*ibid*). This holistic approach to

education demanded mindfulness of one's positionality and emphasized well-being. This meant that educators must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they were to teach in a manner that empowers students. Distinguishing between the ego and self, hooks rejected the objectification of educators within bourgeois educational structures that denigrated notions of wholeness and upheld the idea of a mind-body split; one that promotes and supports compartmentalization. Much like Edward Saïd, who rooted his work in acknowledging one's "contemporary reality" or "personal dimension" (Saïd 1978; also see the Edward Saïd chapter of this volume), hooks was mindful of her positionality in the classroom and written work.

Key Argument

Emerging from the segregated American south, bell hooks was mindful of not only her position in society as a Black woman, but of the blurry lines between the political, cultural, and personal. Her work explicitly reflected this. Among her greatest scholarly contributions was the unearthing of cultural difference, race, and knowledge within feminism, as well as the exploration of intersections between race, gender, and class. Her work explored how darker women are marginalized by social power structures and by White feminists who purport to speak about the universal struggle of all women. A vocal critic of mainstream feminism, hooks argued it silences experiences of race, ethnicity, and class and overlooks, if not directly causes, nuanced harms imposed on non-White women (hooks 1984a).

While White women insisted gender was the determinant of success in their society, for the Black community, shade of colour was the real determinant. hooks explored how the colour-caste system determined that people of darker skin tones had less access and opportunity, while those lighter in skin tone were more likely to integrate into a White-dominated society. 'To be born light meant that one was born with an advantage recognized by everyone. To be born dark was to start life handicapped, with a serious disadvantage' (hooks 1994a, 204). This shadeism led to internalized racism within the African-American community, leading to behavioural change that would allow personal and professional integration into a White-dominated society. Most notably, White notions of beauty determined Black women's employment and portrayal in popular culture that lasts till this day. For instance, hooks discussed the 'Sapphire' stereotype, where 'images of black female bitchiness, evil temper, and treachery continue to be marked by darker skin...no light skin occupies this devalued position' (*ibid* 209). As such, Black women were pushed into a constant struggle to transform themselves to fit into greater society. hooks emphasized the need for Black psychologists and psychiatrists to address the psychological wounds in children and adults alike, and the detrimental effects of the colour-caste system on them. While hooks explored the representation of race in popular culture and how it affects social relations and public education in her *Cultural Transformation* video series, she explained the importance of critical thinking for women and for racial justice.

Critical of this systemic demand of assimilation by Black people to be part of greater society, hooks noted how it undermines subversive oppositional ways of seeing blackness. Racial integration meant that many Black people were rejecting the ethic of communalism that had been a crucial survival strategy when racial apartheid was the norm and embracing liberal individualism instead. ‘Being free was seen as having the right to satisfy individual desire without accountability to a collective body’ (hooks 1994a, 206). As a result, hooks argued that black critical thinkers began to constitute a subculture, and civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. were whitewashed; passionate critiques of militarism and capitalism went unnoticed. This led to hooks’ significant work on feminism.

While feminism had started as a movement to end sexist oppression, hooks argued it would ‘be better defined as the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression without neglecting other forms of oppression such as racism, classism, imperialism and others’ (hooks 1994b, viii). She identified the patriarchy as a socio-political system where males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (*ibid* 26). hooks’ notion of patriarchy is reminiscent of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s ‘intersectionality’ (2015; see the Crenshaw chapter in this volume) as it points to ‘interlocking webs of oppression’ and Crenshaw stresses ‘the intersectionality of race and sex that both play roles in the systems of discrimination’. hooks condemned the legacy of liberal feminism which has made women’s liberation synonymous with gaining social equality with men (hooks 1994b, 67). Excluding men from feminist mobilization reinforces sexism and implicates that women’s empowerment comes at men’s expense. Approaching the patriarchy from a non-intersectional and anti-male angle isolates men and women in their struggles and denies them cross-gender solidarity within socio-economic classes or ethnic groups. Therefore, hooks posited that the feminist movement must clarify an anti-sexism, not anti-male, stance. Such clarity reminds people that both men and women ‘have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action’ (*ibid*, viii).

hooks also argued that, much like women, men are socialized into passively accepting sexist ideology, and that all are hurt by rigid sex roles (hooks 2004, 32). hooks argues that patriarchal ideology brainwashes men to believe their domination of women is beneficial when it is not. It has boys and men believing in a masculinity that denies them access to full emotional well-being. Relative to women, men thus lack the emotional intelligence necessary for their personal and social fulfilment. Sara Ahmed notes that this ‘Psychological patriarchy’ is a valuing system that defines ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, exalting half of our human traits while devaluing the other (2004, 36). Both men and women participate in it. Men are constantly concerned with the contradiction between the notion of masculinity they have been taught and their inability to live up to that unrealistic notion. They are alienated, frustrated, insecure, and direct their aggression—a privilege afforded to them by the patriarchal system—towards women and girls. Their capacity to assert control over their female counterparts is neither rewarding nor fulfilling. Therefore, the crisis facing men is not

the crisis of masculinity, rather the crisis of patriarchal masculinity (*ibid*). As long as men equate violent domination and abuse of women with privilege, they do not realize the patriarchy's damage to themselves and others, and do not rebel against it. Acknowledging this male suffering does not negate or diminish male responsibility for the exploitation of women or male enjoyment of gender-based privileges. Male oppression of women and male suffering from a sexist system can coexist as two connected realities. hooks argues that men who actively struggle against this sexism have a place in the feminist movement. They are women's comrades, as feminism is 'for everybody' and what Sara Ahmed calls '...a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world' (*ibid*; Mehra 2017).

In Application

As bell hooks' feminism calls for the collective struggle of men and women together, it feeds into larger conversations about social movements taking place around the world. Inviting men and women to join forces against patriarchal structures creates greater momentum to overcome them than isolating women in their own struggles. Since practically all forms of oppression are gendered, social and political movements fighting patriarchal institutions tend to have a feminist nature. For instance, while Iraq's Tishreen Movement was not launched with a feminist agenda, women have been at its core and use the movement to further their causes. The movement witnessed a shift in how young men perceived their female counterparts, inviting them to lead protests and even calling the revolution 'feminine' (Al-Hassani 2020; 2023). Challenging ethnosectarian consociationalism, many protestors and activists were aware of its sextarian nature (Mikdashi 2018); that it impacts both men and women, though with women suffering more. In an ethnoconfessionally pluralistic Iraq, intersectionality is crucial. There's a discrepancy in experience between Yazidi and Muslim women; displaced and non-displaced people; Muslim women and men; Afro-Iraqi men and fair-skinned men, etc. Intersectionality helps expose the various forms of socio-political discrimination, and Tishreen's activists understood this when they used the protest momentum to call for the release of Yazidi women from ISIS control. In the current Iranian context, women went out to protest the death of Mahsa Amini and a misogynistic system that controls their bodies. However, those protests have grown as men joined protests, supported women activists, and understood how the system aims to control their agency as well. Because of Amini's Kurdish identity, public discourse engaged in the intersectional oppression of minoritized women. In both contexts, the streets were the space for public pedagogy—women and their allies dropped their egos, brought in their mindful selves, and engaged in active, holistic storytelling for awareness and change. bell hooks' use of storytelling and active engagement as social theory continues to resonate in popular movements, even when not directly acknowledged. Her work particularly resonates among Black women in the West and the diaspora.

Issues to Be Aware Of

bell hooks faced several critiques, the most notable of which was that her voice speaks only to the Black experience in the United States despite her claim to harness multiple voices and cross borders. She neglects a cultural critique of non-Black experiences, though she refers to 'Black' as 'a collective experience of all those who suffer, all those who are oppressed' (Biana 2020, 26). Another critique is that hooks fails to draw a connection between women of varying backgrounds. The experience of women in the West could make use of cultural criticism from women in other parts of the world who also suffer from similar systems of oppression (*ibid*). Noting such criticisms, hooks later expanded those definitions to identify the 'imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (*ibid*, 20). A third critique responds to hooks' invitation to mindful self-critique. It questions whether oppressors would actually interrogate themselves and their reinforcement of dominating systems. She proposes a three-prong strategy which includes honest confrontation, dialogue, and reciprocal interaction (*ibid*). However, it does not guarantee that those who privilege from oppressive systems would engage in self-critique and be mindful of their positionality. On a related note, Spivak claims that the oppressed are not really capable of 'talking back' (*ibid*, 26). The colonizers, in particular, always speak and interpret for the colonized. Orientalism demands domination over knowledge-formation around the Orientalized (Saïd 1978). However, none of this means that the colonized and Orientalized allow their oppressors to speak for them. They continue to talk back, engaging in their own pedagogy inside and outside classrooms, bringing in their holistic selves, action, and reflection upon the world to change it, much like hooks learned from Freire and Hanh.

Conclusion

Exploring the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, and class, bell hooks' writings reflected her concerns with issues related to not only politics, but art, history, sexuality, psychology, and spirituality that she wanted to guide discourse and pedagogy. Employing her academic background to write for a general audience, hooks intended to change how people think of their political realities, engage in cultural criticism, and illuminate what is already known with holistic, loving labour and engagement. Indeed, she has left a lasting impact, especially on Black women who feel empowered by her work. hooks has been able '...to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn...to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin' (1994b, 13).

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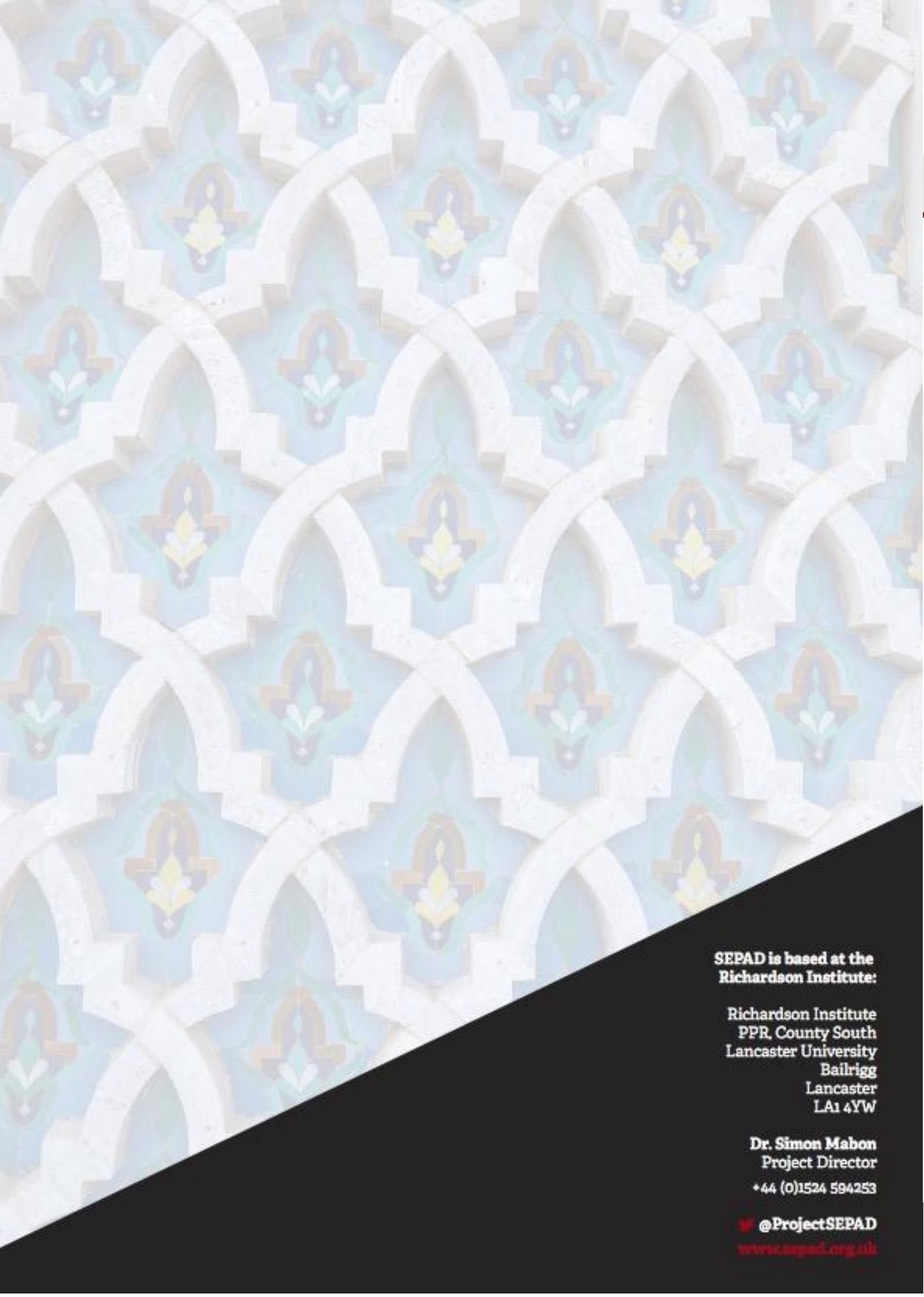
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