



REVIEW ESSAY

A Decade after the Arab Revolutions: Reflections on the Evolution of Questions about the SWANA¹ Region

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A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa. Ed. by Joel Beinin, Bassam Haddad, and Sherene Seikaly. [Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and Cultures.] Stanford University Press, Stanford (CA) 2020. 344 pp. \$120.00. (Paper: \$30.00.)

MAKO, SHAMIRAN and VALENTINE M. MOGHADAM. *After the Arab Uprisings. Progress and Stagnation in the Middle East and North Africa.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2021. xiii, 288 pp. Maps. £69.00. (Paper: £22.99; E-book: \$22.99.)

Global Middle East into the Twenty-First Century. Ed. by Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera. [Global Square.] California University Press, Berkeley (CA) 2021. 360 pp. Ill. \$95.00. (Paper, E-book: \$29.95.)

On 17 December 2010, the self-immolation of a young street vendor in Sidi Bouzid, a town in inland Tunisia, instigated the uprisings that became known as the Arab Spring or the Arab Revolutions – a wording that I will use here as a translation from the Arabic *al-thawrât al-'arabiyya*. Observers were shocked at the radical protests arising in these regions, where authoritarian regimes had crushed all serious opposition over the decades. Conflicts governed by geopolitics, in particular the ongoing Israeli–Arab and Israeli–Palestinian hostilities, and the focus on political Islam and jihadism as the only globalized locus of political protest, have arrogated any attention for societies, their transformation, and their mobilization.

While not entirely ignored in the social sciences, these issues have been dominated by works highlighting the logic of power in silencing protests, stalemates, and clientelist phenomena, i.e. the NGO-ization of social causes.

Here, I would like to examine whether the Arab Revolutions have influenced research and publications on the SWANA region, and what may be said about them today? What is the current debate about definitions and analyses of the characterization of events? To this end, I will review three books in this essay, all

¹South West Asia and North Africa.

published in 2021, on the tenth anniversary of the uprisings. To be clear, this article is based on material that does not necessarily reflect the most representative or influential recent publications. These books are English-language reference works that are likely to modify (or have modified) perspectives on and especially teachings about the region. All three are aimed at inclusion in the curricula for students of political science, social science, and history. As I write, it is 2024, a few months after the deadly Hamas attack and in the midst of Israel's heavy bombardments of the Gaza Strip in response. Clearly, these events overshadow what I write, as do the persistence or resurgence of war and violence in Yemen, Sudan, Syria, and the Kurdish territories.

Moreover, traces of the uprisings of 2011 and 2019 are difficult to discern in countries blanketed by repression, coinciding with the COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine, just as the catastrophic effects of global warming are causing a deterioration in the quality of life (as well as the survival) of SWANA populations, from Lebanon to Tunisia, from Iraq to Morocco. My aim here is not to assess the situation or to reconsider the residual effects of the revolts. Rather, it is to understand what these revolts have enabled us to do and what they have promoted, particularly from the point of view of social history, which continues to receive insufficient consideration in studies of the region.

The Three Books

In its introduction, *A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa* features a carefully considered approach to understanding the events in the region, comprising critiques reflecting two perspectives: “categories of analysis” and “countries/regional studies”, the contributions in the second part resembling illustrations or applications of the categories of analysis. The idea is to submit a proposal articulating macro and micro aspects, thereby enabling a field analysis of systemic issues (land, oil, market trends, and forms of state and power). This can be seen as a continuation of the approach devised in Joel Beinin's earlier work and in the book he published with Frédéric Vairel just before the revolutions of 2011, which combined a social history based on relatively traditional actors who proved decisive, especially in certain countries, with consideration for national and local contexts and their specificities.²

Global Middle East into the Twenty-First Century, which is also a compilation of contributions relating to a key idea, offers a more focused approach to the global aspect and to circulations, with texts that have become classics (such as Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile*) and other more recent contributions. Similarly aimed at promoting understanding of the region, this work is written with the desire to de-particularize the region and to reconcile local situations with global transformations. Here, the interplay of scales is revealed through interconnectedness. In addition, reading texts and analyses that preceded the outbreak of the 2011 revolts shows that this aspect has most certainly been amplified by observing the revolutions.

²Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel (eds), *Social Movements, Mobilization and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford, CA, 2013).

After the Arab Uprisings is somewhat different from the first two books. First, the analysis from two perspectives serves as a synthesizing assessment that is both theoretical and empirical. The question addressed by the authors has been debated extensively in recent years: why have some countries/regions gained access to democracy but not others? While the answer to this question may revolve around analysis of the “Tunisian exception”,³ it is examined here based on seven case studies and is related to four central themes. “*After the Arab Uprisings* offers an explanatory framework to answer these central questions, based on four key themes: state and regime type, civil society, gender relations and women’s mobilizations, and external influence” (p. 13).

One of the main theoretical arguments that emerged from the revolutionary experience was that the region could ultimately transcend its marginal or different nature. Clearly, these three works seek to include the region – whose designation is even being questioned now – in more global debates. This assertion derives largely from longstanding debates: disagreement about Orientalism (Said) and therefore the post-colonial perspective, as well as the debate about the delay in and even the definition of development, which thinkers from the region are contributing to. Finally, the discourse on democratization (and on the possibility of exporting it) was reinforced during the successive Gulf Wars. The prospect of democratization brought about by the US intervention in Iraq (or elsewhere) was counterbalanced in 2011, when these peoples appropriated this quest for democracy. The Arab Revolutions offer an opportunity to rethink democratic emancipation and anti-imperialism together. This issue, which is particularly important in the US context, has been overemphasized in the policies of the US government and its allies. The uprisings are thus perceived as a “window of opportunity”, enabling a dialogue with other regions of the world that have experienced their own waves of democratization; these three books highlight this by articulating global, local, and regional scales.

I will explore the tensions that figure in this both common and distinctive approach. The first necessary step, in my view, is to understand the underlying philosophy of these three approaches. Second, we must consider important aspects such as the place attributed to social movements and protests, the frameworks of analysis favoured, and the shifts occurring in conjunction with the “2011 emergence”, especially through the relative fading of excessive focus on Islamism and the Palestinian question. Finally, other issues seem to have prevailed and are influencing construction of the discipline and how it is viewed. Whether these transformations can be exported is yet another question. In short, are American questions the ones favoured in Europe, as well as in the region itself, of course?

Different Theoretical and Philosophical Approaches

All three books combine global renegotiation of anti-imperialism with in-depth discussion of social actors and their role in political change. The scale of geopolitics is explicitly or implicitly present in each of these works. In *Global Middle East*, the authors explicitly aim to loosen the stranglehold by extracting the region from its

³On this debate, see Leyla Dakhli, “Quelle exception tunisienne ?”, *La Vie des idées*, 7 June 2018. Available at: <https://laviedesidees.fr/Quelle-exception-tunisienne>; last accessed 21 February 2024.

particularism through a connected “global” approach. This is conducive to a close examination of the most local and specific social realities – those most embedded in their context – to show that local life exists, and that the area of Middle East and North Africa often referred to as “MENA” cannot simply be regarded as a vast unified region. This obviously builds on the work of anthropologist Asef Bayat, which has imbued debates for over a decade. First, his research on “social non-movements” has helped identify them as determining elements of resistance in authoritarian countries, based on field studies on the Iranian and Egyptian cases. His work has certainly defined approaches to social movements, while the emergence of the revolts has enabled us to compare observations of the “quiet encroachments”, those “discreet and prolonged ways in which the poor struggle to survive and to better their lives by quietly impinging on the propertied and powerful, and on society at large” (p. 15), with the peaceful but determined and frontal mass movements that arose during the winter of 2011. Bayat has also written two widely discussed books promoting reflection on revolutions.⁴

A discussion of the dichotomy between “ordinary people” and “the system” follows and is immediately diagnosed by the revolutionaries through their flagship slogan (“the people want the system to fall”): some dwell on the system and others on the people. The present work seeks to build bridges and to understand articulations, thereby reintroducing geopolitics as an over-determinant factor.

From the outset, Bayat and Herrera’s book includes the region directly in a “global Middle East”, which they situate within a new-style anti-imperialist mindset. Floating denominations also help us understand how much 2011 affected even the geography of the region. While not always made explicit, everyone discusses the legitimacy of the colonial formula “Middle East”, as well as that of the borders of the region, which had been strongly centred on the Asian part (Mashreq) – the heart of the twentieth-century conflicts – and which are gradually extending towards the Persian Gulf and North Africa. These questions about names are reflections on post-colonialism, as well as on the dynamics within the region. After all, a revolutionary movement that was unleashed in a small town in inland Tunisia was never imagined as having the potential to spread like wildfire as far as Bahrain. Bayat and Herrera conclude their introduction by formulating a problematic proposition: “The challenge is to retrieve such interconnected cultural worlds that Europe repressed by universalizing itself and provincializing the others” (p. 19).

The objective is therefore to approach societies by de-particularizing and enabling comparison and application of social science theories, concepts, and methods, and to discard essentialism and overhanging geopolitical approaches. In this sense, Shamiran Mako and Valentine M. Moghadam’s work may offer a good example of the opposite. In this respect, the book exemplifies analysis based on models and perspectives (already tested elsewhere), as the title “Progress and Stagnation” makes clear from the outset.

⁴Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford, CA, [2010] 2013), p. 5; *idem*, *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford, CA, 2017); *idem*, *Revolutionary Life: The Everyday of the Arab Spring* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

After the Arab Uprisings is probably the most systematic in its approach, especially because it is not a collection of individual chapters but an attempt to synthesize the works. The book figures in a process that may well have been challenged by the revolts and the ensuing commentaries. As an ex-post rationalization, it addresses the causalities introduced in theories of democratization, refining them and adapting them to the context of 2011 and the 2020s. The result is a highly systematic effort to reconcile the data and literature, with consideration for several but not all critiques (e.g. what modernity is, a modern civil society, the place of secularism and gender). Their approach culminates, for example, in a suggestion that there is a predictability to revolutions: following the analysis of the neo-liberal reforms imposed on the countries by Structural Adjustment Programs, the authors consider that the 2011 Arab uprisings were “inevitable” (Chapter 7, pp. 233–235). Although the authors acknowledge the contributions from the analysis of political economy here, noting especially the necessary articulation between economic and political demands, they apparently do not entirely comprehend the critical issues at stake, particularly in seeking to define the actors of these social commitments. This is also clear with respect to gender and the representation of women. Which feminist civil society is being taken into account here? How are feminist movements empowered and legitimized: via endogenous or exogenous channels or by virtue of representation? These questions are neither asked nor answered.

The excellent introduction features a detailed bibliography. The good intentions are undermined by the generally irritating impressions upon reading, for example: “Syria’s militant opposition refused to negotiate with the government, choosing the route of armed violence and thus prolonging the conflict” (p. 42), without questioning the “choice” that may have been available to this “militant opposition” (as opposed to what other kind of opposition?). We find similar shortcuts with respect to Algeria in the 1990s.

Frequently, intentions are attributed to people in formulations that are difficult to support and that form very specific starting points: what the people wanted is taken as read, and in all cases there is an assumption that the people were reacting to the crisis and to a lack of democracy. The constant background question is “why does it work in some cases but not in others?” The two examples of “success” are Tunisia and Morocco, which lead us to the next question: “for whom does it (formal democracy) work?” This entirely policy-oriented question is contained in a very neo-conservative, Euro–US-centric perspective on democratization.

Clearly positioned at the other end of the political spectrum, *Critical Political Economy* approaches the theoretical question differently. In this work, the authors seek to confront the social sciences with analyses from the region, building on an ambition already stated in Beinin and Vairel’s introduction to the second edition of their volume on social movements, written after the Arab Revolutions:

We believe that the Middle East and North Africa can be understood using the tools that social science has developed for the rest of the world. And we argue that the Middle East and North Africa provide a complex and fascinating laboratory, not only to confirm the applicability of Social Movement Theory

but also to enrich our theoretical knowledge of social movements and other forms of political contestation.⁵

Here, the complex notion of critical political economy is tested in the field. Whereas in the 2011 book, the theory of social movements was reviewed in authoritarian contexts, in 2021, the systemic angle is at stake, i.e. capitalism. The Rentier State Theory is the subject of critique, and the Middle East [is positioned] as “a global place” (Introduction). The book is designed as a manual, illustrating these questions through historical examples, to assist our understanding of how the formation of social classes, together with the capitalist accumulation of resources, land, and wealth, have affected the history of the region. In addition, studies on the region are extricated from the dominance of the “cultural studies” approach. Instead, the superseding and more materialist approach relates to social history and political economy, along Marxist (especially Althusserian) lines. The idea is to render various regions and issues (Palestine, the Persian Gulf) less exceptional and to reject segmentations, such as setting “women” apart, to analyse events in their full complexity.

Lessons Learned about Societies

In keeping with the theoretical and philosophical positions adopted, the analyses in these three books shed light on aspects of the societies and states in the region. On the one hand, debates taking place at our northern universities regarding the rest of the world may be regarded as juxtaposing exceptionalization with normalization. The events of 2011 and the years that followed were an opportunity to revive these debates (particularly from the social science perspective) by including the full plurality of societies of the Arab worlds in common lines of questioning (and therefore in the lines of questioning formulated in the societies of the Global North). This gesture is perceived as liberating, as it often allows us to disregard – at least for a while – culturalist explanations (*Critical Political Economy*, see the chapter on Lebanon, which is traditionally seen as an exception within the exception⁶). It often conceals a desire for recognition, a form of competition that is played out, above all, on campuses and in journals.

Here, the improved standing of societies in the Arab world seems to coincide with the discovery by the “first world” of the insurgents, along with their power to act. From the outset, the questions asked targeted youth and the problems and desires among this group, the second-stage revolts, and the modernity of these forms of mobilization. These spontaneous questions, sometimes derided by social science researchers, showcase long-standing debates on designations of societies (long referred to as the “Arab street”), on what we know as civil society, on the role of

⁵Beinin and Vairel, “The Middle East and North Africa: Beyond Classical Social Movement Theory”, in *Social Movements, Mobilization and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford CA, 2013), p. 2.

⁶Ziad M. Abu-Rish, “Lebanon beyond Exceptionalism”, in Joel Beinin, Bassam Haddad, and Sherene Seikaly (eds), *A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford CA, 2020), pp. 179–195.

NGOs or “civic activism”,⁷ (and its associations with politics⁸), on the approach to the subalterns, on the place of war (external or civil), and violence (whether terrorist, violent power practices, or social violence). The struggle to “de-provincialize” the cultural arena is ongoing as well. This concern – which clearly drives *Critical Political Economy* – in which the notion of political economy is pivotal, is revived through its inclusion in a worldview that “critically examine[s] disciplinary, geographic, ethnic, and sectarian boundaries”. The aim of this approach is also to enable first-world specialists to diversify their approaches to society and confront them with observations from the Global South, particularly in terms of intersectionality. To this end, the book is organized around analytical categories, before presenting studies anchored in specific regions, to achieve an analysis of capitalism and systems of operation and dominance through the recent history of the Middle East.

The critique raised in the three books teaches us a great deal about analyses focused on the state (more familiar to us), on conflict, and on conflictuality. In this register, a number of phenomena have regained centre stage: systemic aspects, including major issues, such as the role of the region in global capitalism (since the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire, and the colonial empires), as well as settler colonialism and its economy and effects on society (in colonial Algeria, see Muriam Maleh-Davis’s chapter in *Critical Political Economy*,⁹ and in contemporary Palestine, see Samia al-Bothmeh’s chapter in the same volume¹⁰).

This also means highlighting new players, such as trade unions, and more specific social movements. “New social movements”, in particular migrant movements, integrated into social and political dynamics, are an important focus in both *Global Middle East* and *After the Arab Uprisings*. Of course, these analyses derive primarily from the study of intellectual and artistic diasporas, building on the work of Said. They also offer a way of considering long-standing debates on cosmopolitanism.¹¹ This is absolutely central to *Global Middle East*, which takes into account the many areas of cultural studies in the region and links political and geopolitical questions (borders and belonging, as well as transnational political figureheads, such as Gamal

⁷Gennaro Gervasio and Andrea Teti, “Prelude to the Revolution: Independent Civic Activists in Mubarak’s Egypt and the Quest for Hegemony”, *The Journal of North African Studies*, 26:6 (2021), pp. 1099–1121; and *idem*, “Gramsci’s ‘Southern Question’ and Egypt’s Authoritarian Retrenchment: Subalternity and the Disruption of Activist Agency”, *Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE)*, 50 (2023), p. 175.

⁸Extensive literature has been produced on the NGO-ization of political life in the region. This is particularly the case for feminist and LGBTQI+ movements, specifically in Palestine; see Nour Abu-Assab, Nof Nasser-Eddin, and Roula Seghaier, “Activism and the Economy of Victimhood: A Close Look into NGO-ization in Arabic-Speaking Countries”, *Interventions*, 22:4 (2020), pp. 481–497; Islah Jad, “L’ONGisation des mouvements de femmes arabes”, in Christine Verschuur (ed.), *Genre, postcolonialisme et diversité de mouvements de femmes* (Geneva, Paris, 2010), pp. 419–433.

⁹Muriam Haleh Davis, “Colonial Capitalism and Imperial Myth in French North Africa”, in Beinin, Haddad, and Seikaly (eds), *A Critical Political Economy*, pp. 161–178.

¹⁰Samia Al-Bothmeh, “Repercussions of Colonialism in the Occupied Palestinian Territories”, in Beinin, Haddad, and Seikaly (eds), *A Critical Political Economy*, pp. 215–236.

¹¹Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East* (Cairo, 2009); Will Hanley, “Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies”, *History Compass*, 6:5 (2008), pp. 1346–1367.

‘Abd-al-Nasser or the Sufi poet Rûmi), analysis of transnational militant solidarities, now very present in literature, with various aspects of culture, including material culture. Such analysis, along different channels, is conducive to an environmental and structural analysis in both *Global Middle East* and *Critical Economy*, which, unsurprisingly, includes the now-classic analyses by Timothy Mitchell.¹²

Critical Political Economy and *Global Middle East* thus differ from *After the Arab Uprisings*, in that the analytical categories are questioned and imbued with original analyses, whereas Shamiran Mako and Valentine M. Moghadam focus more on modelling. Their analyses appear to illustrate what a model-based mindset generates if the precursors are not examined. The categories “state and political institutions”, “civil society”, “gender relations and women’s mobilizations”, and “international influences” are taken as indicators, yielding statistics and reports. Yet, these very categories are operative and may, therefore, be subject to, especially historical, critique.

This critique appears particularly sensitive to two central issues in studies of the region until the Arab Spring, namely, political Islam and Palestine, which may have appeared as a way of covering up the diversity and richness of social and political struggles in the Arab world. On reading the three books, we learn that major issues in scholarly literature on the region have been transformed. These are the two subjects that have tended to hide societies and their own conflicts, sometimes transforming them into questions addressing “identity”. In the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution, for example, extensive media analysis attributed the “success” of this uprising to the secular nature of the state. Other analyses noted that an Islamist “winter” succeeded a revolutionary “spring” in Tunisia and Egypt alike, and in the armed phase of the Syrian conflict. *Global Middle East* covers these discussions in an article by Olivier Roy on his theory of “Islamization of radicalism”, although Islamism as such is conspicuously absent from these three works. One could simply say that it disappeared along with the set of “isms” designating fixed political affiliations, including nationalism (represented in some measure by Nasser but captured as a global manifestation in the chapter by Khaled Fahmy¹³). This phenomenon merits mention, all the more so as media and political discourse have continued to focus on jihadist movements and the evolution of Islamism, also in its global form. In the US, we also observe a shift away from the theories of a thinker such as the anthropologist Talal Asad, once both hegemonic and highly controversial.¹⁴

While Palestine may not appear central in the analyses, it remains a paradigm for understanding the region. This is clearly stated in *Critical Political Economy*. Rather than being seen as an exception, Palestine, which has remained colonized, is included within the extended time frame of the colonial situation and visualizes in

¹²Timothy Mitchell, “Ten Propositions on Oil”, in Beinin, Haddad, and Seikaly (eds), *A Critical Political Economy*, pp. 68–84; *idem*, “Cycle of Oil and Arms”, in Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera (eds), *Global Middle East: Into the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley, CA, 2021), pp. 186–194.

¹³Fahmy, Khaled, “Gamal Abdel Nasser”, in Bayat and Herrera (eds), *Global Middle East*, pp. 103–116.

¹⁴For an applied legal science critique of Talal al-Asad and his school of thought, see David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (eds), *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors* (Berkeley, CA, 2006); Khaled Fahmy, *In Quest of Justice: Islamic Law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, CA, 2018).

greater measure the effects of systemic colonialism throughout the region. In this perspective, Samia Botmeh's already mentioned piece is enlightening. She shows, through a densely woven account of economic and social history, how World Bank policies have impeded establishing an independent Palestinian state, and, moreover, how the Oslo Accords have extended this dependence. While the colonial situation experienced by the Palestinians is specific, it enables us to understand the more concealed forms of colonialism that operate elsewhere and is conducive to analyses that articulate the scales of domination.

Openings

These proposals for new ways of teaching the region's history, anthropology, and social and political science relate to objectives and approaches that have emerged and/or were introduced over the last fifteen years.

First, SWANA, by whatever name it is known, has moved. The region's borders have been extended in keeping with migrations and diasporas that extend beyond the confines of the countries or regions "of origin". This territorial expansion has also promoted global historical interconnections, especially in intellectual, cultural, and economic history. While research on the Ottoman worlds had already made this global turn, which often occurs in relation to empires, studies on the postcolonial, though highlighting common destinies, have focused on approaches by the state and, in some cases, by the nation state, elaborating comparative visions at best.

The global turning point has influenced the region's self-projections. Possible topics to cover here include the role of the Arabic language, the effects of transnational channels, or the rise of the internet on reference and recognition systems at the scale of the Arab world. In this context, the new emphasis on migration and the diasporic paradigm, thereby implying a new vision of Arab society – of relocated, decentralized Arab worlds – are noteworthy.¹⁵ Works on Arab revolutionary movements in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, are flourishing, with a strong emphasis on international solidarities forged at the time.¹⁶

These transformations impact disciplinary boundaries as well. And the three books seem, each in its own way, to chart a course for "Middle Eastern studies", drawing it towards general legitimacy, whether in social science and history (*Critical Political Economy*), cultural studies, and global anthropology (*Global Middle East*) or in political theory (*After the Arab Uprisings*).

In the North American and European contexts, bridges have been built between Middle East Studies and Global Studies, approaching the Global South from an

¹⁵Among others, Samuli Schielke, *Migrant Dreams: Egyptian Workers in the Gulf States* (Cairo, 2020).

¹⁶Among many others and with a focus on the international solidarity with the Palestinians, see Yoav Di-Capua, "Palestine Comes to Paris: The Global Sixties and the Making of a Universal Cause", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 50:1 (2021), pp. 19–50; Sune Haugbolle and Pelle Valentin Olsen, "Emergence of Palestine as a Global Cause, *Middle East Critique*, 32:1 (2023), pp. 129–148, doi: [10.1080/19436149.2023.2168379](https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2023.2168379); Abdellali Hajjat, "Les comités Palestine (1970–1972): Aux origines du soutien de la cause palestinienne en France", *Revue d'études palestiniennes*, 98:1 (2006), pp. 74–92; Robert A. Henry, "Global Palestine: International Solidarity and the Cuban Connection", *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 18:2 (2019), pp. 239–262.

anthropological perspective. This approach arises largely from the importance of works such as those by James Scott, which have deeply influenced research on social movements and the recent intellectual history of the region. These include, of course, the previously mentioned work by Bayat, as well as David Scott's work on modernity (and his discussion with Talal Asad), which has had a major impact on the historical anthropology of postcolonial worlds and on the internal logics of transformation in postcolonial societies.¹⁷ On the other hand, complementing this practice, other post-Marxist approaches have sought to develop studies more rooted in post-structuralist materialism, in addition to building on a critique of imperialism and its manifestations (hence what might be likened to "externalist" logics).

These question sessions occurred mostly in a US context that was both specific and hegemonic. They penetrated debates throughout the field. Many were conducted by Arab Americans in academic positions that have become central. They are also strongly focused on teaching and transmission. In this respect, they are fulfilling their mission and are dedicated to imparting knowledge and opening the door to new research.

Moreover, a major novelty of the past decade is that this history is increasingly being written by researchers from the region, born in the region, who are shaping other debates and questions by engaging in dialogue with the existing bibliography and devising other approaches.

At least three such approaches come to mind. One is more resolutely empirical, coming mostly from work on the Maghreb and on sub-Saharan fields, favouring a combination of political science and social history inspired by E.P. Thompson. It investigates actors at the territorial scale (i.e. not among unions but among workers, professions, fixed or transient communities, rebels, or seemingly quiet zones), quite similar to some of the submissions in *Critical Political Economy*.¹⁸ The other is based on the history and theory of emotions and their circulation,¹⁹ with theses in progress and work in social history and ethnographies deriving from oral history that highlights the traces and echoes between historical events, the domains of revolutionary commitment, the "after-lives".²⁰

Finally, an approach to politics based on the experience of revolutions promotes discussions on the question of defeat, the temporality of revolt, the imaginary, and creation. The latter often takes place outside universities, by devising spaces for research and analysis in the independent media and sometimes also in literature and the arts.

¹⁷These influences and questions are decisive, for example, in the approach by Fadi Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Bonds of Emancipation* (Durham, NC, 2020).

¹⁸Leyla Dakhli and Vincent Bonnacase, "Introduction: Interpreting the Global Economy through Local Anger", *International Review of Social History*, 66:S29 (2021), pp. 1–21. doi:10.1017/S0020859021000092.

¹⁹Bilgin Ayata and Cilja Harders, "Midän-Momente. Zur Konzeptionalisierung von Affekt, Emotion und politischer Partizipation auf besetzten Plätzen," in Simon Koschut (ed.), *Emotionen in den Internationalen Beziehungen* (Baden-Baden, 2020), pp. 121–144.

²⁰Among others, Youssef el-Chazli, *Devenir révolutionnaire à Alexandrie* (Paris, 2020); Nayera Abdelrahman Soliman, "Remembering the Bread Riots in Suez: Fragments and Ghosts of Resistance", *International Review of Social History*, 66:S29 (2021), pp. 23–40.

All this calls into question not only what we know, but also how we can compose the history of transnational societies, whose memories are forged by traumatic experiences and moments of collective emancipation, and whose narratives are, to some extent, shared.

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