

TITOLO/TITLE: Counterrevolution and Crisis in West Asia and North Africa (WANA)

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S: BLANCA CAMPS-FEBRER & TIMOTHY E. KALDAS

ACCEPTED LANGUAGES IN THE PANEL: ENGLISH, ITALIAN, FRENCH

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

It is widely believed that the uprisings that began in late 2010 throughout West Asia and North Africa (WANA) are responsible for the widespread turmoil in the region. However, could the efforts to repress those uprisings better explain the subsequent deepening of crises throughout the region? In countries which have experienced uprisings as well as in other countries where regimes fear political contestation, ruling elites have undertaken an array of counterrevolutionary practices that have fueled elevated levels of violence, repression, poverty, and displacement.

The elaborate lengths political regimes go to in order to retain their grip on power offer a structural explanation for the persistent state of crisis experienced throughout much of the region. This reading of the past decade is at odds with other analyses that seek to explain regional crises as extensions of essentialist “age-old hatreds” or a justification for theories of authoritarian stability. Rather, the authoritarian coping mechanisms in response to elevated threats of revolution may better explain the ongoing crises the region is witnessing.

Many of these counterrevolutionary practices have been damaging to the countries these regimes preside over, and predictably so. Nonetheless, they continue to be pursued reflective of what Bichler and Nitzan (2018) conceptualized as a struggle for relative power accumulation. They contend that in a power competition, actors can move to sabotage their rivals even if it means fewer absolute resources for all of them, provided that the rival’s share of power is more severely damaged and reduced in relative terms.

The sabotage strategy can affect the relative share of power of rival actors specifically, but it can also directly harm the interests of the general public. One example is the scorched earth strategy practiced by Bashar Al Assad’s regime in Syria, which has caused a protracted and devastating civil war. In Lebanon, elite competition and efforts to stymie the Lebanese uprising have led to a paralyzing economic crisis and the wholesale collapse of the local economy, leaving 78% of Lebanese living below the poverty line, up from 28% in 2018.

Examples of Counterrevolutionary Practices that contribute to crisis include but are not limited to

- 1) **Counterrevolutionary Capital:** The deployment of capital through political economic strategies designed to expand regime control over the market and ensure widespread dependence and loyalty of private sector actors on the regime while expanding the market share of regime owned enterprises. While effective at weakening potential rivals, these practices in Egypt have deterred investment, slowed economic growth and job creation while poverty rises.

- 2) **Counterrevolutionary Securitization:** Under the narrative of counter-terrorism, regimes have increased the deployment of security measures against opposing groups as well as to monitor the general population. Invasive surveillance practices against activists and critics have been legitimized by the 'threat of terrorism' and instability, while regimes normalized exceptional executive and discretionary powers. Charges of terrorism have been deployed against critics to justify mass imprisonment and even massacres of protestors. In the name of counterterrorism competition, regimes have been able to secure external funding and support while quieting criticism of widespread and destabilizing practices of repression.
- 3) **Counterrevolutionary Violence:** Counterrevolutionary securitization can also be taken to greater extremes to justify direct violence. Mass repression has been widely used by regimes in an effort to hold on to power and deter challengers resulting, at times, in open armed conflicts, widespread insecurity in the region, and severe humanitarian crises. This can be seen in a number of countries to varying extents. One of the most extreme examples is Syria, where Bashar Al Assad has overseen a massive military campaign to put down an uprising against his regime that has left hundreds of thousands dead, and over ten million Syrians displaced.
- 4) **Counterrevolutionary Foreign Policy:** In the past decade there has been an expansion of regional powers deploying power across their borders. While regional powers have long used capital to influence events and bolster allies, there is an increased willingness to deploy military power alongside capital to protect existing autocracies and establish/reestablish others. The UAE, which has not experienced an uprising domestically, has nonetheless aggressively expanded its counterrevolutionary foreign policy giving economic and military support to autocratic allies while participating in the direct intervention in Yemen.

While many of these practices are features of power competition more broadly, the recent threat of revolution has led to an intensification of these practices as regimes see more internal and external threats against their survival. This perspective suggests that research focusing on counterrevolutionary practices can better elucidate the driving causes of crises in WANA.

This panel seeks to explore how counterrevolutionary measures are pivotal drivers for crisis as they increase regional instability and social, economic and humanitarian crises. We welcome papers discussing regime survival strategies and their impact. Papers should focus specifically on how these practices and strategies structure the array of crises facing WANA populations.

Chairs: Timothy E. Kaldas & Blanca Camps-Febrer

Panelists:

- **Jülide Asci**, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB):
 - "Counterrevolutionary Practices in Erdoğan's Turkey during the State of Emergency 2016-2018 – Manifestations in domestic Turkey and its foreign relations.

By presenting a case study on Turkish development cooperation in Ethiopia and juxtaposing it to counterrevolutionary practices in Turkey after the coup attempt in July 2016, this paper unravels the scope and consequences of these practices as part of a power competition among Turkish elites and of a regime survival strategy of the AKP-led government. For this purpose, the Sociology of Power (Ferran Izquierdo Brichs, 2017) and Securitization Theory (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998) served as theoretical frameworks. The case study on Ethiopia draws mainly upon semi-structured interviews with relevant actors in Ethiopia in Spring 2020 and Spring 2021. The study on the State of

Emergency 2016-2018 in Turkey draws upon a content analysis of the 37 decrees issued during that same period. The paper shows that the latest counterrevolutionary practices can be seen as pivotal drivers for recent crises, both, domestically as well as in Turkey's foreign relations.

- **Itxaso Domínguez de Olazábal:** "On the counterrevolutionary potential of the Abraham Accords."

Drawing substantively on racial capitalism, this research looks into how recent normalization agreements between Arab countries -mainly the United Arab Emirates (UAE)- and Israel could be considered as examples of counterrevolutionary counter-regionalisation the Arab world and neighbouring regions are witnessing as of lately. Through an array of mechanisms, a number of individuals are included in a surplus of dispensable population - mirroring racial capitalist processes articulated by the US in which both black people and radicals questioning the status quo were demonised and made redundant for the rest of the society - so as to maintain the current context at the domestic and the transnational level.

The research will focus on why racial capitalism -and not ethnocracy- is the appropriate framework to understand Israel and the UAE when it comes to both its citizenries and regional and global processes of capital accumulation and defence of a specific narrative. Regarding the transnational, the research will reflect how these states shape a hegemonic discourse that automatically expulses individuals not aligned with their main interest, but also how very material structures and dynamics contribute to maintaining racialization and counterrevolutionary rejection.

- **Melania Brito Clavijo,** Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB):
 - "Human Rights Acrobatics. An assessment of Egypt's instrumentalization of counterterrorism legislation to constraint civil and political rights"

In understanding the aggravation of the crises in the Arab countries that followed the misnamed 'Arab Springs', the political tendency on the part of most regimes shows an evident change towards the reinforcement of authoritarianism. Eleven years after that revolutionary spirit that filled the public space with all kinds of pro-democratic slogans, hybrid regimes within this geography have resorted—and continue to do so—to one or another mechanism to legitimize an entrenchment in power that has a dire impact on human rights. Making an analytical review of the latest legislative reforms, this working paper aims to confirm to what extent is the Egyptian regime of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi using an ultra-nationalist security discourse as a device to legitimize restrictions on civil and political rights and dismantle any dissidence. The structure of the document delimits two complementary parts: a theoretical introduction presenting a philosophical debate on the theorization of human rights within the universal paradigm and the challenges of its application on traditional Islamic societies; and a second part providing empirical evidence to prove the accuracy of the main hypothesis.

- **Timothy E. Kaldas,** Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB):
"Counterrevolutionary Capital: How the Sisi Regime Used Capital to Consolidate Power in Egypt"

During the latter years of Hosni Mubarak's rule in Egypt a group of crony capitalists loyal to Mubarak and his son, Gamal, were built up as a new center of power in the Egyptian regime with the hope that they could provide support for Gamal's eventual succession. Following the overthrow of Mubarak in 2011, the military oversaw a transitional period that witnessed a focused targeting of Mubarak era business elites tied to the regime.

Since coming to power via a coup d'état in 2013, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's new regime has worked assiduously to consolidate power and part of that effort has been tied to preventing the reemergence of a politically empowered crony capitalist class.

To achieve this, the regime has developed and deployed an elaborate political economic strategy in which regime centers of powers and institutions expand their control over the creation and distribution of new capital in Egypt to prevent the emergence of any external political competitors fueled by independent capital. This *counterrevolutionary capital* strategy, at times, actively sabotages economic growth if that growth cannot be controlled. This paper will elaborate the strategies of *counterrevolutionary capital* in Egypt employed by the country's new regime.

- **Blanca Camps-Febrer, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB):**
 - "Commercial Security and the reinforcement of neoliberal authoritarianism"

A market of private 'security' has flourished in Morocco in the last 30 years. Only a handful of private security companies (PSCs) existed in the 1990s. Today, following the global trend, estimates account for thousands of local and international companies acting in the country. Yet the Moroccan regime does not seem to lose ground in its centrality in deploying coercive power in the name of a certain narrative of 'security'.

My research shows that public elites in Morocco present a complex attitude towards the private sector but mostly find strategies to accommodate. In turn, an ever more pervasive privatization of individuals' and communities' lives through a biopoliticized 'security' is either done through exclusion and criminalization of certain communities and marginalized populations, selective intrusive surveillance, or through technological and gated protection of the privileged class and of mass privatized land like malls and free trade zones.

In sum, although framed within a neoliberal agenda of marketization, new 'security' practices and narratives benefit from a strong coercive State in order to provide the regulatory and normative framework for a market-oriented 'security governance' and for a certain consistency of the hegemonic '(in)security narrative', a shared field of power that benefits both private and public 'security' actors, as well as the current neoliberal authoritarian governmentality.

References

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Buzan,Barry;Wæver, Ole and Jaap de Wilde(1998):Security: A New Framework for Analysis.Colorado: Lynne Rinner Publishers.

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Blanca Camps-Febrer is a PhD Fellow at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. She is an active member of the Research Group IRWANA (www.irmena.net) as well as the Center Delàs for Peace Studies (www.centredelas.org/). She has been a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (Harvard University) and at the Centre Jacques Berque Rabat (IFRE-CNRS). She has worked for civil society groups in the region, on international development and human rights issues. A Political Scientist and Masters in International Relations, Security and Development, her research is mainly situated within critical security studies, transnationalism, and feminist studies in Northern Africa and West Asia.
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Timothy Elhami Kaldas is a PhD candidate at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. He is an active member of the Research Group IRWANA (www.irmena.net) and a policy fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (www.timep.org). He has spent 12 years living and working in Cairo in a range of fields, including consulting on communications and risk while teaching as visiting professor of politics at Nile University. He holds an MA from Georgetown University in Arab Studies with a concentration in politics. His MA

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