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TITOLO/TITLE: FOOD POLITICS IN POST-2003 IRAQ: LOOKING AT THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS

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ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Food is essential for life. Therefore, it is central to many different political and social dynamics and a powerful lens through which to explore broader issues of power and identity both locally and transnationally.

Food politics is of crucial importance to the Arab region, one of the most food insecure regions of the world (Harrigan, 2014). This is even more true for Iraq, home of the flood plains of the Tigris and Euphrates, a country self-sufficient in food mere decades ago and today heavily dependent on food imports and highly food insecure. How did a state so abundantly rich in agriculture become such a net food importer? What policies of food production, consumption and distribution have domestic political leaders and external actors adopted in search for food security and political stability? How have these policies impacted the lives of the Iraqi population? What do Iraqi civil society and social movements have to say about it?

By concentrating on the largely unexplored Iraqi politics of food since 2003 with a historical, interdisciplinary and bottom-up approach linking political economy and subaltern/social movements, the panel aims at contributing both to the emerging historiography debate on Iraq (for an overview Tejek et al. 2012) and to the growing critical literature on food insecurity in the Arab region (Ayeb and Bush 2019).

The need for a political economy and historical approach looking at the interplay between the national, the regional and the international levels:

Food and agriculture issues have received growing attention among scholars and international agencies focusing on the Middle East and North Africa, particularly after the 2007/2008 global food crisis and the 2011 Arab uprisings. The numerous reports published by international agencies frame the region as one of the most 'food insecure' of the world defined on the basis of the FAO standard definition. However, scholars have largely questioned the dominant food paradigm for its technocratic, quantitative and deterministic approach that completely omits crucial issues of power, control, distribution and agency (Ayeb and Bush 2019; Harrigan 2014; Zuraik and Gough 2004; Woertz 2013). By contrast, they have underlined the need to understand the food question through the lens of history

and political economy. Understanding the reasons behind the food crisis today requires exploring how local food systems have evolved over time; how ruling elites, regional and global actors – their policies and narratives as well as the interplay among them - have shaped contemporary patterns of food production, distribution and consumption; how eventually their power and control over food systems have shifted; who has gained and who has lost. All these questions are crucial also for Iraq, yet the country has remained largely at the margin of existing studies. The few available studies on Iraq that take a political economy and historical perspective tend to concentrate on the period of the UN embargo in the 1990s (Woertz 2017; Koc et al. 2007).

The need for a bottom-up approach

As demonstrated by the work on food politics in the Arab region (Zuraik and Gough 2004; Ayeb and Bush 2019; Bush 2014), the problem of food insecurity in Iraq should be analysed with a bottom-up approach that takes into account how food and agricultural policies have affected access to land and other resources, food consumption and distribution, as well as people's well-being and their livelihoods. A bottom-up approach also entails to investigate how rural and urban populations have mobilised against expropriation of resources, growing inequalities and impoverishment, policies of agricultural restructuring, environmental crises and so on. More in general, scholars have acknowledged the link between rising food prices and political protest (Ayeb and Bush 2019; Harrigan 2014; Gana 2012; Bush and Martiniello 2017). Indeed, "bread, freedom, social justice" was a recurrent slogan of the 2011 Arab protests. This is even more valid for Iraq, where relevant cycles of popular protests have emerged at least since 2011, raising the attention of scholars and observers especially after the 'October 2019 Revolution' (*Thawrat Tishrin*) (for ex. Costantini 2021; Majeed 2020). However, contentious politics in Iraq has not been studied yet in relation to food, agricultural and environmental related questions.

In the light of the above, the panel aims at investigating post-2003 Iraqi food politics by exploring two major areas of research:

*The history of state policies and narratives with respect to food production, consumption, and distribution since 2003 and how they have interacted with the policies of global and regional actors (e.g. patterns of food trade, international aid, control over food systems, etc.); who has gained and who has lost in the process.

*Contentious food politics and collective action investigating how, over the period under scrutiny, emerging and more consolidated civil society groups and social movements in Iraq have positioned themselves with respect to the food question (or related issues such as environment, water, health, poverty, etc.) and to the policies and narratives deployed by state, regional and global actors, but also at spotting bottom-up initiatives, alternative models and practices and new forms of mobilization.

We welcome paper submissions that tackle one or more aspects of the above.

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