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TITOLO/TITLE: Taking Stock of a Revolutionary Decade

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ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

In the wake of the 2007-08 economic and financial crisis, the world has witnessed the outbreak of an unprecedented number of mass mobilizations (Chenoweth 2020; Beissinger 2022). The Middle East and North Africa has been the epicentre of this upsurge in the activity of the masses from below. It also represents the region that epitomizes at best one of the main contradictions of today's politics: that is, the incapacity of mass protest movements to unleash deep social and political transformations. In reacting to this, researchers have debated whether and to what extent these events could be considered as revolutionary episodes and why, to borrow from Asef Bayat's (2017) lexicon, revolutions that were particularly strong as movement achieved so little in terms of change. More broadly, the events in the Arab world and neighbouring countries have opened up reflections in the field of study on revolution. Scholars have questioned whether the habit to divide scholarship into generations retains its enduring validity, the supposedly emergence of a fifth generation of studies, the possibility to move beyond generational thinking, and how the field might evolve in the wake of the changing nature of revolutionary episodes (Abrams 2019; Lawson 2019; Bayat 2021; Beck and Ritter 2021; Alexander 2022; Allinson 2022; Beissinger 2024).

This panel invites scholars to take stock of the revolutionary decade that the Middle East and North Africa writ large experienced in the 2010s and beyond. It aims to gather researchers who, starting from different perspectives (for instance, comparative politics, international relations, sociology, political theory, political economy, anthropology and the like) and based on a plurality of methodologies, could study and reflect on revolutions, revolutionary situations and revolutionary movements. Within this broad framework, the panel encourages the submission of paper proposals addressing one or more research topics from the following non-exhaustive list:

- How revolutionary episodes in the Middle East and North Africa have affected the field of study on revolution and where it is heading for;
- The structural factors that could account for the outbreak of revolutionary situations, paying specific attention to political economy, uneven development, and the dynamics at play between the international and the domestic;
- How revolutionary processes emerged and developed over time, addressing in particular the contingent character of the sequence of events, their uneven internal temporality and the different spatialities of contentious politics;

- The character of revolutionary movements, their organization, internal composition, repertoire of mobilization, ideological framework and the like;
- The specific role that collective actors such as the labour movement, the peasants, trade unions, the women, youth groups, minorities, political parties, NGOs, non-state actors and the like have played in paving the way to and supporting the revolutionary mobilizations;
- How and why revolutionary movements were not successful, exploring the ideological context in which they operate, their intellectual points of reference, the lack or the weakness of revolutionary parties, the subaltern cultural politics, the incapacity of the labour movement to lead the process and the like;
- The success of counter-revolutions, focusing in particular on the international order and the material and ideological interests of imperialist and regionalist powers, domestic state apparatuses, neo-reformist parties, Political Islam and the like;
- How the failure of revolutions has impacted on subsequent political trajectories, such as regime dynamics, deployment on the international chessboard, policy, fate of revolutionary movements, class balance, gender relations, protection of minorities and the like;
- Whether and to what extent revolutionary activists and leaders have learned from defeats, changing or partially reframing their own political positions and ideological orientations

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***Mosalsalat* Republic: Ramadan TV Series and the Management of Dissent in al-Sisi’s Egypt**

Marco Pinfari, University of Pavia

The rise of authoritarian regimes in the aftermath of the so-called Arab Uprisings has by now been widely addressed in the literature. It remains unclear, however, if interpretive frameworks predominantly focused on the *repressive* power of such regimes are sufficient for explaining their survival in the face of repeated international crises and prolonged economic woes.

This paper presents some of the avenues through which one of such authoritarian regimes – Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi’s regime in Egypt – has managed, channeled and coopted dissent on specific areas of public concern, while otherwise continuing their repressive practices and consistently resisting calls to increase the accountability and transparency of the regime itself. Some of such strategies involved a theatrical and selective involvement of members of “civil society” in government-driven initiatives, such as the “Egyptian National Dialogue” launched in May 2023. Particular attention will be paid, however, to the role of a highly popular form of entertainment in Middle Eastern countries – Ramadan TV series – in showcasing themes of public concern, especially (but not exclusively) in areas related to family law, such as child guardianship or rape within marriage, but also economic deprivation and the lack of social mobility. The paper notes, in particular, the appearance in recent years of what appears to be a distinct genre of TV series with a highly dramatic content and a direct focus on exposing controversial social practices, which included the series “Highest Viewership” (*Aala Nesbet Moshahda*) in 2024, “Under Guardianship” (*Taht al-Wesaya*) in 2023 and “Newton’s Cradle” (*Le’bet Newton*) in 2021.

The paper proposes two main arguments. On the one hand, it notes that the appearance of this genre can be seen as an example of “commodification of dissent”. The repression of all forms of public debate is increasingly seen as an opportunity for commercial TV stations who, striving to diversify their products and attract more viewers against intense competition (in Egypt alone private TVs have produced between 30 and 70 new series each year), decide to highlight the plight of specific sectors of society – especially women and socially-disadvantaged groups. Secondly, it argues that the tolerance shown by the otherwise restrictive censoring authorities is part of a strategy designed to allow, as in the case of the National Dialogue, specific forms of dissent to be voiced and then serviced by state authorities – as long as they do not threaten the core political, economic and security concerns of the regime. Especially in relation to the theme of child guardianship, the paper will trace the performative practices through which MPs and then the National Dialogue itself have appropriated the issues raised in the *Taht al-Wesaya* series as an example of the responsiveness of the regime to the concerns of Egypt’s women.

Hegemony, moral economy and workers in Iraq's Ministry of Industry and Mineral post-2003.

Mehdi Shakarchi – PhD candidate LSE

Since the US-led invasion in 2003, workers in state-owned enterprises under Iraq's Ministry of Industry and Minerals (MIM) have led a protest campaign against efforts to downsize and privatise their places of work. Based on various primary sources including Baathist material, interviews with MIM workers and participant observation amongst SOE workers, I argue that the campaign is driven in part by the belief amongst MIM workers that the Iraqi state in the post-2003 period has reneged on its responsibilities both to workers and to the national economy. MIM workers' belief is informed by the lingering traces of the post-colonial moral economy, which made up part of a broader attempt at hegemony. Beyond material factors, part of this moral economy entailed the sense propagated by post-colonial regimes and primarily the Bath regime that state workers were making a meaningful contribution to the development and protection of the nation in a manner which was akin to military service, particularly during periods of war and sanctions. The imposition of a neoliberal reform program in the wake of the US-invasion saw workers and public industry enter a period of declining productivity and stagnation which has spurred workers that are otherwise ambivalent towards or in many cases strongly opposed to Baathism, to defend the pre-2003 productivist moral economy as a partial solution to the economic and political crises associated with the neoliberal period.

Solidarity: The Feminist Transnational Decolonial Route

Shereen Abouelnaga

The ongoing genocide in Palestine demonstrates the title Walter Dignolo has picked for his 2011 book *The Darker Side of Modernity*. How to subvert analytically settler colonialism without losing the gains of modernity is an epistemic, theoretical, and empirical challenge especially for feminist thought and studies. Decolonial thought, as opposed to the colonial stand, provides a safe path towards the concept of pluriverse. The rising global feminist solidarity with Palestine proves that borders cannot maintain their power in front of the powerful flow and mobility of liberating and liberatory practices. Palestine is a feminist issue is a vision that drives its legitimacy and validity from the interconnectedness between capitalism/ patriarchy and racism/ coloniality. Therefore, "the decolonial option is the relentless project of getting us all out of the mirage of modernity and the trap of coloniality" as Dignolo states (2011, 17).

This paper seeks to investigate how the discursive practices of feminist collectives from the Global North and Global South are bent on confronting the coloniality of power where the world is bifurcated into two zones: human/ non-human, and subject/ object. This binary facilitates two forms of coloniality: coloniality of knowledge, manifested in epistemicides; and coloniality of being of which dehumanizing the indigenous is a stark example.

To understand how feminist thought and activism are carving a decolonial path, the paper reads several feminist statements of solidarity with Palestine. These statements employ a discourse that argues "Palestine is a feminist issue." It is a strategy that is reminiscent of Black feminists whose struggle revolved around acknowledging racism as a feminist issue.

Consequently, in their accumulation, these statements cross borders- geopolitical, mental, ethnic- to “de-link from the tyranny of abstract universals” (Mignolo, “Introduction: Coloniality” 159). Moreover, they adopt interculturality- as opposed to multiculturalism- to promote “transnational identities in-politics”; thus, helping in “the re-creation of identities that were either denied or acknowledged first but in the end were silenced by the discourse of modernity, postmodernity and now altermodernity” (Decolonial Aesthetics I).

The paper aims at proving that radical and revolutionary statements of solidarity with Palestine offer A Decolonial Feminism that is capable of not only confronting but also subverting racism, capitalism and imperialism, as Françoise Vergès has explained.

Rethinking Revolution

Gianni Del Panta (Università di Pavia)

The outbreak of an impressive number of mass movements in different world regions over the last 15 years has reinvigorated the scholarly interest in the interplay between protests from below and regime dynamics. By representing the most turbulent region, the Middle East and North Africa has also epitomized at best the stunning contradiction between the unfolding of powerful revolutionary movements and their blatant incapacity to unleash deep political and social changes, let alone revolutionize societies. This, in turn, has sparked reflections in the field of revolutionary studies. This article aims at contributing to this debate in two main ways. It firstly discusses what revolution is and is not. By revising the main definitions of the phenomenon and accepting its nature as of an essentially contested concept, the article separates the end of a revolution from its beginning. It subsequently discusses what accounts for the outbreak of a revolutionary situation and proposes clear criteria to evaluate whether and to what extent a revolution has been successful. Although these aspects have been recurrently debated in revolutionary theory, the article grounds its perspective in the standpoint of concrete totality, which is based on an ontology that is absolutely relational. This inspires both the understanding of a revolutionary situation and how it can be studied. Secondly, the article presents a different way of reflecting upon knowledge accumulation in the field. It does so by moving beyond the classic habit to divide revolutionary studies into generations of scholarship and exploring how revolutionary theory might benefit from a rethinking of space (moving beyond analytical bifurcation between the domestic and the international), time (reading history forward) and interactions (rejecting essentialist interpretations of social and political actors) in revolution. The case of Tunisia (2010–14), Egypt (2011 – 13), and Algeria (2019–21) are used to show how the approach works.

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Critical Reflections on Agency

Presenter: Rusha Latif

This paper interrogates some of the salient tropes that have been used to describe the 2011 Egyptian revolution, particularly the notion that it was spontaneous, leaderless, and driven by social media. Moving beyond these reductive tropes, it takes for granted that there were, in fact, leaders in the revolution and instead focuses on understanding their agency: what enabled it, what constrained it, and ultimately what prevented them from achieving a winning outcome for their movement. At the center of this analysis is the Revolutionary

Youth Coalition (RYC), the first and arguably most significant front born of the nationwide revolt—in fact, it was the closest thing the revolution ever had to a vanguard organization. The RYC comprised the political youth groups most active on the ground before the uprising. Building on their long history of collaboration, they strategized together for January 25 and drove the revolutionary movement that followed, especially as it played out in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with RYC leaders in Cairo in 2011 and additional interviews with them in the years of upheaval that followed, the paper examines the horizontal leadership and organizing processes they engaged and the challenges they encountered along the way. To make sense of their experience, the paper makes use of classical Marxist theories on revolutionary organizing. In doing so, it demonstrates the limitations of these theories and the need to imagine new ones that take into account the full complexity of the challenge of carrying out revolutions in our era. By reframing the youth-instigated uprising not as a failed revolution but as a robust revolutionary experiment for us to learn from, the presentation will offer some starting points for how we might think about movement leadership, organization, and structure anew to meet this pressing challenge and transform the social order.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

Gianni Del Panta is Junior Assistant Professor in Political Science at the University of Pavia, Italy. His main research interests concern political regimes, revolutionary movements, and the dynamics at play between protests from below and authoritarian regimes, especially in North Africa.

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