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*“Women, and women’s rights, were at the center—
not the margins—of Tunisia’s revolution.”*

How Women Helped Shape Tunisia’s Revolution and Democratic Transition

VALENTINE M. MOGHADAM

As a small North African country, Tunisia did not loom large in either anglophone scholarly works or geopolitics until recently. It was the Arab Spring, launched by Tunisia’s January 2011 revolution, that brought the country to international attention as the one success story of the regionwide events: a nonviolent uprising leading to a democratic transition. Something else that set the Tunisian revolution apart was the key role played by the country’s strong feminist movement, which has set an example among Arab nations for decades.

Tunisia was long known in the region for its liberal family law, the Code of Personal Status (CSP), which was adopted by the postcolonial state under President Habib Bourguiba in 1956, three years before the constitution was ratified. Bourguiba, a French-educated secularist and admirer of Turkey’s Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, justified this law in terms of *ijtihad*, the use of independent reasoning in interpretation of Islamic texts—a practice found in reform movements across the Muslim world. Although silent on the matter of equal inheritance rights, the CSP established a minimum age of marriage (15 for girls and 18 for boys), abolished polygamy, and gave women rights to divorce and child custody. In 1973, Tunisia became the only country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to legalize medical abortions—for married women, and during the first trimester.

Most Tunisian women are fervent supporters of the family law and have fought efforts to under-

mine or repeal it. Despite its relatively small size, Tunisia’s feminist movement has taken on controversial issues such as domestic violence, sexual rights, equal inheritance, mixed marriages, and women in political leadership roles.

Tunisian feminists have been able to weather constraints and leverage opportunities to hold on to past achievements and to expand them. They have built on a legacy of “state feminism”; demonstrated a propensity for coalition-building with allies in government, political parties, and civil society; and at times taken radical and assertive stances. They have navigated fraught relationships with both the authoritarian regime before the revolution and Islamists afterward. And they are still working for reforms to address the socioeconomic difficulties that afflict working-class women and families.

STATE FEMINISM

A body of scholarship in Middle East women’s studies has identified a form of state feminism as a characteristic of the modernizing regimes in the MENA region from the 1950s to the 1980s. These authoritarian regimes sought to involve women in state-building and development projects, albeit within limits and to varying degrees across countries. During this period, and starting from a very low base, most MENA countries saw increases in female literacy and educational attainment; women’s employment as teachers, health workers, and civil servants; and the establishment of what the United Nations called the “national women’s machinery”—state-led women’s policy agencies tasked with adhering to UN mandates and mobilizing a population of loyal female citizens.

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Among Arab countries, Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–70) and Tunisia under Bourguiba (1956–87) are regarded as the quintessential state-feminist regimes, but the two differed in that Muslim family law was retained in Egypt, so women's rights and participation in public life were more circumscribed there. Tunisia's family law was at the time the region's most liberal and is still cherished by the country's feminist movement. Sociologist Mounira Charrad has explained how the adoption of the CSP was part of Bourguiba's project of building a modern and centralized nation-state. Another scholar, Khedija Arfaoui, has called it "Bourguiba's gift to women and to the nation as a whole." While encouraging women to enter the work force, Arfaoui adds, Bourguiba emphasized fields suitable for women's "natural dispositions."

Those fields gradually expanded as more women were encouraged to participate across economic sectors, including export manufacturing. In the 1980s and 1990s, Tunisia (along with Morocco) had an unusually large proportion of its female labor force in the manufacturing sector, compared with other MENA countries—especially those boasting large oil industries. But Tunisian state feminism also gave educated women access to positions in the judiciary: increasing numbers of women worked as judges as well as lawyers. MENA countries that adhere to sharia deny women judicial appointments.

Institutions for and by women emerged, even if some experienced tensions with the authorities. The Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT), formed in 1961, supported the state's modernization policies and helped implement them. Representatives of the UNFT were present at the UN's World Conference of the International Women's Year (first in a series of conferences on women's issues), held in Mexico City in 1975.

A ministry of women's affairs was established in 1984. In 1990, the new government of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali started the Center for Research, Studies, Documentation, and Information on Women (CREDIF) to carry out studies for use by development planning authorities. Since 1993, Tunis has also hosted the headquarters of the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), a regional agency that has been directed by strong women's rights advocates such as Nabila Hamza and Soukeina Bouraoui. Through-

out the Bourguiba and Ben Ali eras, Tunisia's modernity was linked to the advancement of women. The progressive image of *la femme Tunisienne* distinguished Tunisia from other Arab countries.

Tunisia's autonomous feminist organizations have been remarkably durable. In the 1970s, an independent form of feminism developed among the growing population of educated women, attracting radicalized university students and young professionals. Women with left-wing or liberal ideals, and those familiar with the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, formed study groups on development issues. In 1978, some of them established the Club Taher Haddad, named for a left-wing Tunisian male modernizer and reformer in the early twentieth century.

On March 8, 1980, as Tunisian women celebrated International Women's Day for the first time, members of the club proposed the idea of founding a commission to address the concerns of working women. Two years later, around 60 women, some of whom were already members of the powerful

General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), met at the club and adopted a formal structure for the Commission for the Study of Working Women's Condition.

During the Bourguiba era and into Ben Ali's, Tunisia maintained an independent foreign policy that favored global integration and good relations with Arab neighbors. Given its small economy and lack of oil, Tunisia had to diversify into other sectors—and this brought more women into its labor force than was the case in other MENA countries, particularly the oil-exporting ones. Tunisian women had relatively more access to work in production sectors as well as the professions, and more opportunities to organize as workers and mobilize as feminists. As participants in the postcolonial development process, women contributed to national modernization while also helping build civil society, a key pillar of the democratization process yet to come.

Cracks in the Bourguiba regime started to appear with the onset of a debt crisis and the imposition of structural adjustment policies and austerity measures, which coincided with the rise and spread of fundamentalist movements. The UGTT organized anti-austerity protests in 1984, while Islamists began to assert themselves, inspired by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Islamization proj-

Tunisian feminists had accumulated three decades of experience in organization and mobilization.

ect in Iran and the US-supported jihad against a pro-Soviet, modernizing government in Afghanistan. The emergence of Islamist politics alarmed women's rights advocates and gave them a strong incentive to organize and mobilize in new ways. They also took positions on international issues, such as denouncing Israel's 1982 incursion into Lebanon and its treatment of Palestinians.

MAKING INROADS

Two influential feminist organizations received legal recognition in 1989: the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) and the Association of Tunisian Women for Research on Development (AFTURD). Among the founders of the latter was student activist and women's rights advocate Maya Jribi, who later helped found the Progressive Democratic Party (subsequently renamed the Republican Party, which she co-led). She emerged as an important political actor during the democratic transition. (Jribi tragically died of cancer in 2018, just 58 years old.)

The feminist groups criticized the shift to structural adjustment and neoliberal economic policy, as well as the growing Islamist movements in the region, which they saw as a threat to the progress Tunisian women had achieved. Islamists were demanding either the reinforcement of existing religious laws and norms or their introduction and strict application. In addition to the prohibition of alcohol and usury, and the requirement that women be veiled in public, Islamists sought orthodox interpretation and implementation of Muslim family law, regulating marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and more. Codified in the modern period of state-building but derived from medieval-era schools of jurisprudence, this body of religious law places females under the authority of male kin and husbands, thus consigning them to second-class citizenship.

To women's rights advocates across the Muslim world, political Islam was a threat. Tunisian feminists feared that the Islamist movement would force the repeal of the progressive family law, the CSP.

Founded by Rachid Ghannouchi in 1981, the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), which later came to be known as Ennahda (or Al-Nahda), was inspired by the revolution in Iran and by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. (In a pattern found across the MENA region, governments allowed Islamists to organize in the 1970s and early 1980s as a way of undermining what were then strong left-wing

movements.) The MTI was banned in 1989 after members were charged with inciting violence.

In the 1990s, social and economic development, a well-organized welfare system, and friendly ties with Europe as well as the Arab world and Africa preserved Tunisia's stability, though there were occasional trade union protests against economic liberalization. US-sponsored democracy promotion programs led to a period of limited and managed political liberalization. This broadened opportunities for Tunisia's growing civil society, including the UGTT, feminist associations, human rights groups, and dissidents associated with left-wing political parties. The former Communist Party, now renamed Tajdid (Renewal), was legalized in 1993. That same year, ATFD established a counseling center and hotline for women victims of domestic violence, a decade before the government established a physical shelter. The initiative spread to Algeria and Morocco and eventually elsewhere in the Arab region.

As the twenty-first century began, Tunisian women were prominent in the professions, making inroads into previously male-dominated associations of journalists, lawyers, judges, medical doctors, scientists, and human rights advocates. The UGTT had a women's section, staffed largely by teachers and health workers; the employers' association included businesswomen. Many new women-led nongovernmental organizations emerged. Prominent female lawyers were active in women's rights groups and other civil society bodies. In 2004, ATFD advocacy led to the passage of the country's first law against sexual harassment.

UNEASY YEARS

Despite such advances, the relationship between feminists and the state was fraught with tension. On the one hand, feminist groups were tolerated and given some room to maneuver. In a national context that emphasized a moderate Muslim identity and modernization, Tunisian progressives, including feminists, were able to secure positions in universities, government, civil society, business, the judiciary, media and the arts, and political parties. The Ben Ali regime saw itself as the protector of Bourguiba's legacy and a champion of women's rights. The state and the new feminist groups largely agreed on the need to oppose political Islam.

On the other hand, dissent was not permitted, and feminists as well as other dissidents were often surveilled or questioned by the political po-

lice. Although the ban on political Islam had been welcomed by Tunisian feminists and secularists, a number of secular human rights lawyers represented Islamists in court—and were themselves harassed or interrogated.

When offered the opportunity to work with government agencies or attend international meetings, feminist activists had to weigh the risk of co-optation against the danger of irrelevance. One way of staying both relevant and autonomous was to undertake commissioned studies on various aspects of women's lives. Independent feminist scholars contributed such studies to CREDIF, CAWTAR, the UNFT, and the National Office of Family and Population. Their analyses pointed to precarious working conditions in the wake of privatization of factories, hotels, and other enterprises; marginalization of rural women and the growth of informal economic activities; the prevalence of domestic violence; and growing unemployment.

In the 2000s, feminist groups pushed for gender equality in matters of inheritance, and worked together and with other civil society associations for human rights, social welfare, and fair elections. At a seminar in Helsinki in September 2004, feminist lawyer and AFD member Bochra Belhaj Hmida told me: "We recognize that, in comparison with other Arab countries, our situation is better, but still we have common problems, such as an authoritarian state." (In 2014, she was elected to a seat in parliament.)

Feminists formed a number of coalitions with leftists and trade unionists critical of the authoritarian regime. In October 2004, prominent dissidents organized a public protest against Ben Ali's run for yet another term as president. Emna Aoudi, a teacher who was active in both the UGTT and the women's movement, worked with activists from Tajdid in the 2004 elections. As she explained to me in March 2015, "We had years of struggle before the 2011 revolution and paid a high price for our activism in those early years."

Tunisian society was becoming increasingly discontented with the authoritarian rule of Ben Ali's regime and the corruption of his extended family. In 2008, the AFD declared: "Our work on behalf of women's empowerment is also aimed at political change and is part of the movement for democratization." That same year, AFTURD asserted, "No development, no democracy can be built without women's true participation and the respect of fundamental liberties for all, men and women." Meanwhile, young Tunisians adopting the Internet

as a field for activism included Emna Ben Jemaa, who was briefly detained after taking part in a May 2010 anti-censorship protest, and Lina Ben Mhenni, who became a well-known blogger during and after the revolution.

On the eve of the Arab Spring, Tunisian feminists had accumulated three decades of experience in organization and mobilization. Through active involvement in civil society, they had acquired skills in cultural production, advocacy efforts, use of new information technologies, and engagement with various constituencies. Their presence across multiple domains proved decisive in the contentious politics that followed the uprising, and they would continue to campaign for women's full and equal citizenship during the democratic transition.

SEIZING THE MOMENT

Ben Ali's economic liberalization policies, coupled with the growing number of educated young people who could not find gainful employment, generated mounting discontent in Tunisian society. The effects of privatization, the rising cost of living, and high unemployment were exacerbated by the global recession of 2008, triggering labor protest actions. In 2010, WikiLeaks published revelations of self-enrichment and corruption involving the family of Ben Ali's wife, enraging Tunisians.

When Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor who was ordered by police to stop his trade, resorted to self-immolation in December 2010, his act seemed to be a symbolic protest against the collective loss of dignity. The suicide led to massive street protests that continued into the next month. Demonstrators demanded Ben Ali's resignation and insisted on their right to employment. Leftists, secularists, feminists, trade unionists, and supporters of Ennahda all took to the streets, while young people kept up the momentum through social media.

Although some 300 citizens were reportedly killed by the military and police in the course of the demonstrations, the protesters themselves were nonviolent. Women from nearly all segments of society took part, and their large presence arguably contributed to the peaceful nature of the protests. When the military decided in January that it would no longer oppose the protesters, Ben Ali left Tunisia for exile in Saudi Arabia.

Recognizing that the collapse of the regime could provide Islamists with an opportunity to take over, feminist groups swung into action. Recalling Ennahda's regressive stance on women's issues in

the past, Tunisian feminists staged a protest on the eve of Ghannouchi's return from exile in January 2011. They showed that they could mobilize effectively against attempts by conservatives to undo the gains of the past or to compromise women's rights through new constitutional language.

AFTURD and ATFD organized marches in 2011 and 2012 calling for "liberty, dignity, and equality." Women of various ages held placards reading *Ne touche pas à mes acquis* (Hands off my rights). They also encountered a new phenomenon made possible by the political opening: the public presence of bearded men and heavily veiled women wearing the all-encompassing *niqab*, who espoused an aggressively fundamentalist worldview and opposed the country's secular institutions. A secular-religious divide would dominate the country's politics for the next few years.

Nonetheless, Tunisia's procedural democratic transition was uniquely inclusive of women. A transitional government made up of four High Commissions prepared the way for elections to the National Constituent Assembly, which would draft the new constitution. Leading women's rights advocates participated in the High Commissions in varying capacities. The transitional government declared a *parité* law to mandate women's inclusion on political parties' lists of candidates. It also withdrew Tunisia's "general reservation" to the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had allowed it to opt out of certain provisions.

Many political parties, old and new, ran in the October 2011 elections. Ennahda received just 37 percent of the vote, but that was enough to make it the leading party, giving it the right to form a coalition government with two secular parties. To compete for the female vote, Ennahda fielded women candidates, as did other parties. Women won 27 percent of the seats in the assembly. Most of them were from Ennahda, reflecting its plurality of the vote, but the other women members proved assertive, especially during the contentious debates that followed.

Of the 107 parties that were legalized in August 2011, three were led by women. The Modern Democratic Pole featured a significant number of women at the head of its electoral list. Another party, El Massar, had a policy of gender parity and

sent outspoken left-wing women to the assembly, notably Nadia Chaabane, who had moved back from France. She and other Tunisian feminists received support from French, Canadian, and other international women's rights groups.

The next two years were challenging. The Ennahda leadership had promised not to overturn the liberal family law, but many of its members and supporters openly decried the Bourguiba legacy and demanded sharia law. Salafists disrupted art shows and movie screenings, ransacked liquor stores, and harassed a renowned university official with impunity, adding to suspicions about Ennahda's true intentions. The party's delegation in the Constituent Assembly sought to replace the term "equality" with words like "complementarity" or "partnership" in the new constitution. Women's rights activists and their male supporters in the secular and left-wing parties took to the streets and to the domestic and international media in protest. Ennahda was compelled to retreat.

A political crisis erupted following the assassinations of two left-wing political figures in 2013. A new round of protests demanded accountability for those deaths and the country's socioeconomic problems. Four civil society groups stepped in to mediate between Ennahda

and the main secular opposition, averting a possible civil conflict. They came to be known as the National Dialogue Quartet.

The quartet comprised the UGTT, the Tunisian Bar Association, the Tunisian League for Human Rights, and the employers' association led by businesswoman Wided Bouchamaoui. After lengthy and arduous negotiations, the government agreed in October 2013 to resign and make way for a caretaker administration and elections once the new constitution was finalized and adopted. That occurred in January 2014, to much domestic and international acclaim. For its efforts, the National Dialogue Quartet received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015.

Article 46 of the new 2014 constitution confirms that women's rights will remain in place. Hafidha Chékir, an activist and law professor who was a member of the council of experts advising the Constituent Assembly, said: "It's not the constitution of the Islamists but of civil society." Samia Letaief, a trade unionist and women's rights activist, told me in 2014: "We are very happy with the

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liberal family law.*

equality article in the constitution.” But she added that there was still much to do, “and anyway Ennahda is still here. So I can’t celebrate yet.”

WORKING WOES

Even if legal rights for women are secure, social and economic rights remain elusive. Tunisia’s labor law differentiates between the public and private sectors, disadvantaging many low-income and working-class women. In the unionized public sector, social insurance is provided and women are entitled to two months’ paid maternity leave and on-site child care facilities at workplaces with more than 50 employees. For the private sector, the law stipulates a leave of just 30 days, and small enterprises are exempt. There is no gender distinction in social security provisions, but the mandatory requirements apply to civil servants only.

Because of the limited length of paid maternity leave and the absence of affordable preschool facilities, many employed women find it difficult to balance work and family life. Others—especially from lower-income households—choose not to join the labor force. The result is a female labor-force participation rate of just 24 percent. Participation is highest among women with university degrees, but they also have the highest unemployment rates.

As a 2015 CREDIF report showed, work contracts no longer guarantee long-term, stable employment. Private universities, for example, rely mostly on temporary rather than permanent teaching staff. In 2015, the female unemployment rate of 22 percent was twice that of males, and concentrated among young university-educated women. A 2014 official report showed that the highest female unemployment rates were found in the country’s interior, reaching 40 to 46 percent in the provinces of Kebili, Gafsa, and Tataouine—two to three times higher than men’s rates.

The problem of female unemployment predates the revolution, but it worsened when investment sharply declined in most sectors following the upheaval. Foreign direct investment dropped by 29 percent in 2011, and 182 foreign firms closed their operations, resulting in the loss of nearly 11,000 jobs. The tourism sector lost significant revenue, especially after two terrorist attacks in 2015.

In 2016 the government issued a development plan that aimed to jump-start economic growth and also to raise women’s workforce participation rate to 35 percent. At the same time, however, it

had to institute austerity measures as part of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund for a \$2.8 billion loan. These unpopular cuts led to widespread protests in early 2018.

There is a gap between the civil and political rights achieved in the course of Tunisia’s democratic transition and the persistence of difficult economic conditions. Women’s advancement requires the rights enshrined in the new constitution to be supplemented with policies for economic empowerment.

CENTER STAGE

Women, and women’s rights, were at the center—not the margins—of Tunisia’s revolution. This central role reflected long-term advances in the status of Tunisian women resulting from nearly five decades of state feminism. Women had built strong and effective feminist organizations, and developed ties to progressive political parties. Tunisia’s robust civil society was supportive of women’s rights, thanks to the involvement of rights advocates in an array of civic organizations, policy agencies, and professional associations. Through these activities, women had acquired political know-how and civic skills.

Women helped ensure the peaceful nature of the protests that drove Ben Ali from power, an effective democratic transition, and the adoption of a forward-looking constitution. Since then, Tunisia’s feminists have crafted an ambitious agenda that includes ending all forms of violence against women and building consensus for a parliamentary bill to enshrine equal inheritance rights for women. They found some common ground for cooperation with female lawmakers from Ennahda that helped secure passage of a landmark July 2017 bill to prevent and punish violence against women.

No similar coalition has taken shape to back equal inheritance rights, though. Polls show that goal does not enjoy popular support. Unlike his late predecessor, Beji Caid Essebsi, Tunisia’s new president, Kais Saied, who was elected in October 2019, does not support the equal inheritance bill. This suggests more effective feminist advocacy is needed. Progress in infrastructure development, job creation, support for working mothers, and social welfare in the neglected interior regions could help mitigate entrenched conservative social norms and build more support for a broad feminist agenda. ■

“One of the essential tasks of the movement is to reconstitute a richer tapestry of Algerian nationalism than has been permitted since independence.”

The Layers of History Beneath Algeria’s Protests

MURIAM HALEH DAVIS

Algerians have been protesting against their regime for months, maintaining a staggering revolutionary momentum. The demonstrations began on February 16, 2019, in response to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s attempt to run for a fifth term despite having been incapacitated for several years. They prompted Bouteflika’s resignation on April 2, but this has not satisfied the protesters, who are calling for genuine political change and the removal of the current ruling elite (known as the *isaba*, or gang). They have also rejected the elections currently scheduled for December 12.

Across the country, people now associate Fridays with the act of participating in a *vendredi*—a compound word that merges *vendredi* (Friday) and *dire* (to say). Fridays are not the only designated day of protest, though. On Tuesdays, students take to the streets, giving this movement, known as the Hirak, a strong intergenerational element.

The youth of many protesters has marked the symbols they deploy, ranging from historical figures of the 1954–62 Algerian Revolution to the action movie star Chuck Norris. Similarly, the number five—referring to Bouteflika’s reelection bid—features in many jokes. One poster invoked an iconic perfume, declaring, “Only Chanel has the right to have a No. 5.” Indeed, in the early days of the protests, the Hirak was commonly known by a second moniker: the revolution of smiles.

To understand the role of youth in these protests, as well as the insistence on peaceful methods and demonstrations of civic responsibility, one must delve into the history of the country even before it achieved independence in 1962. Humor has

long been a tool used by Algerians to navigate the absurdity—and violence—of political life, both in Algeria and in exile. One thinks, for example, of the comedian Fellag, who has been performing in France since the late 1990s; he left Algeria due to the violence of the civil war, when intellectuals, journalists, and artists were at risk of being assassinated. His humor is based on self-mockery. In his show *The Dinosaurs*, he recounts that modern civilization was born in the Mediterranean, and North Africa was traversed by the Phoenicians, who brought commercial exchange, and the Egyptians, who invented the pyramids and hieroglyphics—but in Algeria, he claims, nothing of the sort took root (*walou!*).

The Algerian people are used to being represented by others—not only by comedians, but also by historical narratives and political figures. Since February, however, Algerians have insisted on representing themselves, disproving the caricatures of a childlike population with no civic values that is incapable of governing itself. They have also insisted on representing their own history, defying the state narrative. They are struggling to reappropriate their country’s past even as they demand the right to decide their own future.

REVOLUTIONARY NARRATIVES

The Algerian War of Independence, also known as the Algerian Revolution, has a mythic status in the global history of decolonization. The 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers*, directed by the Italian Gillo Pontecorvo, was inspired by the memoirs of Saadi Yacef, an Algerian nationalist who also stars in the film. It depicts the struggle for an Algerian nation-state through a particularly violent episode of the war that was concentrated in the Casbah, or “native section,” of the capital city. It focuses on both the intense repression by the

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French colonial regime and the acts of violence—sometimes against civilians—committed by the Algerian nationalist party, the National Liberation Front (FLN).

The conclusion of the film shows FLN leader Ali La Pointe and his three companions hiding out in a building, refusing to surrender to the French army. The entire building is eventually destroyed by the French, making Ali La Pointe a martyr or *shahid* for the national cause. If there is any doubt that Algerian protesters have a developed sense of historical justice, consider that images of Ali La Pointe have been displayed on posters, flags, and prominently placed graffiti on the streets of Algiers since February 22.

But in 2019, the FLN is no longer the hero of Algerian nationalism. Even though the FLN and its shadow party, the National Democratic Rally, have held a monopoly over Algerian politics and history, they are now being massively rejected. Yet the protesters find themselves in a double bind: How to criticize the FLN, which has long claimed the mantle of the Algerian nationalism, without rejecting the legacy of the revolution itself?

One way of navigating this quandary is to affirm the importance of heroes of the War of Independence who have been systematically overlooked by official historical narratives. Hirak activists are actively developing such a counternarrative.

Take Messali Hadj, the so-called father of Algerian nationalism, who came to prominence among Algerian workers in France between the two world wars. Messali was linked to the French Communist Party before breaking with it over its foot-dragging on the issue of Algeria. During the War of Independence, supporters of Messali Hadj who refused to join the FLN were systematically targeted by the nationalist party, which tolerated no rival faction. As much as the revolution pitted the French state against Algerian nationalists, it equally gave rise to a fratricidal struggle among nationalist factions. This was exemplified by the 1957 Melouza massacre, in which 374 villagers were killed by the FLN.

Even though Messali Hadj has long occupied a marginal place in Algeria's official memory, his importance has been repeatedly affirmed over the course of the Hirak. In April, his daughter Djanina Messali-Benkelfat expressed solidarity with the protests from Montreal, attracting widespread media coverage in Algeria. In June, on the 45th anniversary of Messali Hadj's death, protesters in his hometown of Tlemcen paid homage to him.

THE BERBER FACTOR

One of the essential tasks of the movement is to reconstitute a richer tapestry of Algerian nationalism than has been permitted since independence. This is a matter not only of resurrecting certain figures, but also of revisiting the very ideological basis of Algerian identity. Messali, after all, was a partisan of Algeria's Arabo-Islamic identity, another issue that has become a major source of contention for the Hirak.

One of the characteristics that distinguishes North Africa from its Arabophone cousins to the east is the presence of a large Amazigh (Berber) population, which makes up 20 to 30 percent of the Algerian population. Berbers were the original inhabitants of the region—they lived in North Africa before the Arab conquest in the second half of the seventh century.

Because the appellation “Berber” is rooted in the Greek name for North Africa, “Barbaria” (literally, “land of the barbarians”), members of this ethnic group have refused the label, calling themselves Amazigh (or the plural, Imazighen), which means “free people” in their language, Tamazight. Despite their centuries of intermixing with the Arab population, a French colonial myth asserted that the Amazigh were “more civilized” than the Arabs, whom the French believed were more influenced by Islam.

The question of whether to endorse Algeria's Islamic and Arab orientation split nationalists even before the War of Independence. The “Berber crisis” of 1949, for example, occurred when members of Messali's party (then called the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties) accused other comrades of being “Berberists” and thus encouraged a particularistic vision that undermined the unity of Algerian nationalism. Although many prominent Berber politicians—most notably Hocine Ait Ahmed—did participate in the War of Independence, fighting alongside the FLN, political and ideological divisions resurfaced soon afterward, threatening to explode into civil war. In 1963, just one year after independence, Ait Ahmed created the Socialist Forces Front (which is now Algeria's oldest opposition party), leading a guerrilla insurrection against the Algerian state's increasingly authoritarian tendencies.

The question of Berber identity has also been influenced by Algeria's relationship with France. In the 1950s, a preference for Amazigh workers meant that over half of Algerian immigrants to France came from the region of Kabylie, whose

inhabitants have been central in the struggle for linguistic and cultural recognition. Links with the Algerian diaspora in France added a transnational dimension to this struggle—many activists have historically resided in the diaspora.

The FLN's insistence on a singular Arab identity and language yielded little place for Berber cultural expression. It was only in 2002 that Tamazight was recognized as a national language, meaning that it could be taught in school. But Berber activists had to wait until 2016 for their language to achieve official status, so that it could be used in administrative documents.

Berber identity has often been framed as a threat to the territorial integrity of the Algerian nation-state. The Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylie, a group with deep links to diasporic Algerians in France, has called for self-governance. This has allowed the regime to use the specter of separatism to discredit any activists with links to Berber causes.

In June 2019, the Army chief of staff, Gâid Salah, proclaimed that only the Algerian flag would be tolerated during protests. Demonstrators carrying the Berber flag have often been punished with fines and prison sentences. The official state newspaper, *El-Moudjahid*, claimed that such displays were attempts to divide the Algerian people and introduce “identitarian” slogans that threatened national unity.

Protesters are not falling for this attempt to cast plurality as an act of treason. The years after the revolution left many with the feeling that independence had been “confiscated” by political “clans” that put their own desire for power and wealth before the interests of the nation. Algerian protesters are trying to reappropriate the historical resource of the revolution to undermine this ruling elite.

THIRD-WORLDIST AMBIGUITIES

The first years of independence did not lead to stability. Ahmed Ben Bella, the only civilian president (with the exception of the ephemeral Mohamed Boudiaf), was overthrown by his defense minister, Colonel Houari Boumediène, in 1965; Ben Bella was kept under house arrest until 1980. Ben Bella's ambitious program of agricultural and industrial self-management and heady discourse of Arabo-Islamic identity gave way to Boumediène's more austere style of rule, which became increas-

ingly statist and tolerated no political or cultural expression outside of official channels.

During this period, Algeria became known as the “capital of revolutions,” offering refuge to radical movements from the Palestine Liberation Organization to the Black Panthers. In 1969, Boumediène hosted the Pan-African Festival in Algiers, bringing together international musical stars such as the South African Miriam Makeba and the American Nina Simone, as well as many other artists and intellectuals.

Algeria's revolutionary fervor was not only cultural and political but also economic. Starting with the 1962 Evian Accords, the treaty in which France granted independence, Algerian politicians rejected French attempts to hold onto the oil-rich southern territories of the Sahara Desert. Yet the provisional Algerian government still offered important concessions to French oil companies, despite its revolutionary rhetoric that the country's resources should be used to advance the interests of the Algerian people. Later, as the tide of third worldism mounted, Boumediène's rhetoric also focused on the economy. In 1971, he nationalized oil production, insisting that Algeria was “not for sale.”

This idea resurfaced on October 13, 2019, as protesters decried the interim government's move to amend the 49/51 ownership law, which requires Algerian majority ownership in all projects involving foreign investment, including the oil sector. The accusation that the regime has mismanaged and embezzled oil rents is a recurring theme for the Hirak, which insists on recovering control of the country's wealth. One well-known chant declares that the regime has “eaten the country” (*klitu al-balad*), gorging itself on the fat of the land, and cartoonists such as Dilem depict military generals as grotesquely obese.

BENEFITS OF MARTYRDOM

One way that Algerians have consistently been able to access material goods is through a form of rent very different from oil that derives from the figure of the *moudjahid*, or ex-combatant in the War of Independence. In Algeria, the president swears the oath of office not only on the Quran, but also on the blood of the martyrs of the revolution. The current electoral law stipulates that any candidates born before July 1, 1942, must prove

*Algerians have been trying
to reclaim their own history
since the late 1980s.*

their participation in the revolution. Members of later generations, who were too young to actively participate, must prove that their parents were not involved in acts deemed hostile to the revolution.

In this way, the War of Independence gave rise to a “revolutionary family” that continues to receive special economic and social benefits. The Office of National Moudjahidin (ONM), created in 1963, is responsible for determining who is a veteran of the war. This status comes with housing allotments, stipends, and access to preferential health care.

The question of who counts as a *moudjahid* has been the subject of many scandals. As the country has undergone dramatic generational changes—the number of births doubled between 2000 and 2017, and 70 percent of the population is under the age of 30—the ranks of *moudjahidin* grow every year as descendants of ex-combatants seek recognition from the state in order to qualify for the benefits associated with this status. Since 1992, quite a few “fake” *moudjahidin* have been exposed. These tangles of historical memory, bureaucracy, and corruption have contributed to a sense of revolution fatigue.

At the same time, the HIRAK has shown that the symbolism of the martyr is not completely exhausted, but rather is being used for specific political ends in 2019. The appearances of certain well-known *moudjahidaat* (female revolutionary fighters) at the protests have attracted considerable attention. Lakhdar Bouregaa—an ex-*moudjahid* who has been in prison since June for supporting the HIRAK—delivered a message to the media on October 8, highlighting his military credentials and his participation in the War of Independence. The Algerian press often refers to him as “the *moudjahid*” in articles—an indication of the weight that his historical legitimacy lends to his insistence that participation in the HIRAK is an act of patriotism. Even as the ONM urges participation in the elections scheduled for December 12—which have been rejected by the HIRAK—protesters continue to demand the release of Bouregaa, hailing him as a “great *moudjahid*.”

OCTOBER ECHOES

While the War of Independence is an inescapable touchstone for contemporary politics and protests in Algeria, the HIRAK has also highlighted

other historical events. For example, on October 5, protesters commemorated the events of October 1988, a period of protests and riots that led to both a democratic opening and a period of extreme violence. Much as in 2019, young people were at the forefront of a series of protests that decried the lack of economic opportunity and political liberties.

The conditions for revolt had been building since the early 1980s. The so-called Berber Spring (*Tafsut Imazighen*) began in March 1980 with demonstrations and strikes, advancing claims for cultural and political representation. It also posed an open challenge to the state’s monopoly on political expression after a decade in which oppositional forces—including leftists and Islamists as well as Berberists—had operated in a semi-clandestine fashion. Even though this uprising ended in violent repression, it nevertheless was a key moment of contestation that would be remembered by Berber activists in Algeria and across North Africa.

Economic frustration was epitomized by two common types: the *trabandistes*, who illegally imported items from Europe and sold them on the black market, and the *hittistes*, young unemployed men who seemed to be literally holding up the walls as they loitered

on the streets. The economic and social blockages they embodied culminated in the riots of October 1988, and transformed an unlikely item—Adidas’s “Stan Smith” sneakers—into an icon of revolt. As these tennis shoes arrived in stores, coveted by a population that could not afford them, youths started looting. In football stadiums, fans chanted, “He who doesn’t have Stan Smiths is not a man.”

The violent clashes between demonstrators and police that ensued between October 5 and 10, 1988, resulted in the deaths of 500 protesters. They were seen as a new crop of martyrs, though this time the word referred to those who had been killed by the forces of the Algerian state rather than by the French colonial army. In this context, martyrdom received no legal recognition. But Avo 88, an organization dedicated to the memory of those who were killed or disappeared during the civil war, has requested an official status for these more recent victims.

In October 2019, demonstrators repeatedly invoked the violence of October 1988, connecting their protests with those that began 31 years ear-

Humor has long been a tool used by Algerians to navigate the absurdity—and violence—of political life.

lier. One organization that has been particularly targeted by the regime during the Hirak, Youth Action Rally (RAJ), was formed with the express goal of commemorating the events of 1988. The symbolism was not lost on the authorities, who began a new wave of repression at that very juncture.

The October 1988 protests led to a brief political opening that was followed by a decade-long civil war. Testifying to the depth of confusion and amnesia that marks discussion of the period, historians still debate the correct name for those years of violence. The terms “dark decade” (which has a wide consensus behind it), “national tragedy” (an official epithet), and “civil war” each have their partisans.

In February 1989, a new constitution was adopted with over 73 percent of the vote in a referendum. It introduced a system of political pluralism and liberalization of the public sphere and the media. It also gave rise to open discussions of the role of the army in politics, as well as economic reforms.

Yet this turn to liberalization also permitted the victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), a grouping of different Islamist tendencies, in the municipal elections of 1990 as well as in the first round of legislative elections, held in December 1991. The second round—scheduled for January 16, 1992—never occurred. Instead, the army organized a coup on January 11 in order to halt what it portrayed as an Islamist threat to democracy. FIS supporters were subjected to widespread repression; some were sent to camps in the south of the Sahara. Thousands of prisoners disappeared, and their bodies were never found.

The civil war, which left between 100,000 and 200,000 people dead, has often been narrated as a conflict between Islamic radicals and the state. More recent testimonies have complicated this narrative. Numerous musicians, journalists, and intellectuals were assassinated over these years. It is often unclear who was responsible for certain acts.

Nevertheless, the extreme violence convinced the Algerian people that any frontal confrontation with the state and the military would be imprudent and could serve as a justification for another violent crackdown. This history was often invoked to explain why Algeria did not experience the same forms of mass protest seen in Egypt and Tunisia during the so-called Arab Spring. Hirak organizers have emphasized the peaceful and orderly nature of the 2019 protests and have gone to great lengths to keep them that way.

The historical amnesia concerning the civil war is rooted in the state's efforts to close the books on the conflict. After Bouteflika was first elected president in 1999, he immediately introduced amnesty and clemency measures, which eventually resulted in the 2006 Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation. This document offered financial reparations to the families of those who were disappeared during the violence, in exchange for a written statement that the state was not responsible for their fate. It also threatened prison sentences for those who “instrumentalized the wounds of the national tragedy” or who tarnished the image of Algeria abroad.

By depoliticizing the conflict under the moniker of “national tragedy,” the state has effectively closed the door to a real understanding of what happened during those “dark” years. Bouteflika's legacy as the president who ended the civil war and brought stability to the country is embedded in this closure of historical inquiry. As the saying goes in Algeria, “*lifat mat*”—that which is over is dead. Luckily for historians, however, the notion that one can arrive at the end of history, or that it can be killed off altogether, is rarely convincing.

Groups such as SOS Disparus and the Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria have continued to investigate the deaths and disappearances of loved ones. Long before the Hirak, these groups were defying the security forces' pressure to stop their regular demonstrations calling for justice and historical memory. In the current protests, alongside homages to heroes of the revolution who had been marginalized or assassinated, it is not uncommon to see protesters brandishing pictures of family members who were disappeared during the civil war. While the state has actively fashioned certain *trous de mémoires* (historical black holes), Algerians have been trying to reclaim their own history since the late 1980s.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Despite the often repressive nature of the Algerian regime, it would be a mistake to describe this system as a dictatorship or to overlook the plurality of political life, even if it is largely controlled by the state. Under Bouteflika, there were multiple parties, (largely) free elections, and a press that often critiqued the status quo. Yet these political openings were structured by the regime, which used them to incorporate potential sources of opposition into its orbit. The Algerian state has proved resourceful in manufacturing legitimacy—

from instrumentalizing Sufi networks known as *Zawiyas* to promote a less contentious form of Islam, to upgrading its image on the world stage by rebranding itself as a “reliable partner” in the war on terrorism declared by the United States after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

While the political field remained extremely fragmented, the state adopted the trappings of democratization to continue business as usual. This is why resistance has been localized and organized around specific issues in recent years. For example, the National Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Unemployed, created in 2011, has demanded more development and a more just distribution of resources for southern Algeria. The Barakat (Enough) movement arose during Bouteflika’s run for a fourth term, but remained a largely urban presence. Its spokesperson, Mustafa Benfodil, a prominent journalist, was arrested while covering the Hirak but then quickly freed on October 8.

Others have not been so lucky. At the time of writing, it is difficult to determine how many Hirak supporters have been placed in detention, but

the number seems to be around 100. Karim Tabbou, who was a key figure in the Socialist Forces Front before participating in the founding of the Democratic and Social Union, was kidnapped by plainclothes officers on September 11 and remains in detention. There are reports that he has been held in solitary confinement. Amnesty International has expressed concern at the hardening repression of the Hirak.

Despite the enormous obstacles, the movement shows no sign of letting up. As a protester said on Facebook, “One hears that 7 months of Hirak is enough. I remind these weathervanes that the Hirak of our elders lasted for 7 years.” This idea that the Hirak is completing what could not be achieved in 1962 is often invoked.

The current revolutionary narrative is being fashioned with the memories of past struggles. In Algeria, historical interpretation has become a tool that activists are wielding with extraordinary creativity. The contemporary moment of the Hirak is thus inseparable from the historical time of revolution and decolonization. ■

“Today it is hard to imagine the connection between the world that revolutionary impulse envisioned and the actuality it generated in the Islamic Republic.”

Reconsidering the Iranian Revolution, Forty Years Later

BEHROOZ GHAMARI-TABRIZI

During US President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai was asked about the impact of the French Revolution. “Too early to say,” Zhou famously responded. Recently, Chas Freeman, who served as a translator for Nixon on the trip, recalled that Zhou misunderstood the question and thought that he was being asked about the 1968 riots in Paris. But the mistake, as Freeman said, “was too delicious to invite correction.” Whatever Zhou really meant, his words could serve just as well as a response to the Iranian revolution of 1979. It is too early to say whether it was a success or a failure. Like all other revolutions in world history, the Iranian revolution has left competing legacies. These legacies continue to unfold and demand further examination of the scope and meanings of the revolution and its place in history.

To many at the time, a full-scale revolution in Iran was unthinkable. When President Jimmy Carter lifted his glass at a royal reception in Tehran on New Year's Eve in 1977 and saluted the shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, for turning Iran into an “island of stability” in the Middle East, no eyebrows were raised among the friends or foes of the monarchy. Just over a year later, after months of protests on the streets of Tehran and other cities, big and small, millions of jubilant Iranians overthrew the shah, terminating the dynasty his father had inaugurated fifty years earlier.

Although the revolution came as a surprise, early historiographies turned it into an inevitable outcome of the shah's modernization program—an extension of a colonial project that began in the late nineteenth century and intensified un-

der the two Pahlavi monarchs. These structural analyses highlighted the uneven core of the shah's approach, which generated two interconnected processes: political repression and the widening of palpable inequalities that persisted despite an infusion of wealth into the economy as a result of an unprecedented rise in oil prices.

The shah's socioeconomic reforms, inaugurated as the White Revolution in 1963, were part of a far-reaching industrialization plan. Agrarian reforms and land redistribution, extensive literacy programs, and women's suffrage produced rapid demographic changes in large cities, particularly Tehran. As rural-to-urban migration accelerated, in the absence of adequate infrastructure—jobs, roads, utilities, schools—large clusters of shantytowns began to encase major cities around the country.

In 1975, as he sought to revive the ancient Persian Empire's glory and oversee the nation's passage through the “Gates of the Great Civilization,” the shah intensified his repression with the establishment of a single-party autocracy. The notorious secret police, the National Organization for Security and Intelligence (SAVAK), brutally dismantled the radical opposition posed by the communist urban guerrilla fighters known as the People's Fedayeen. Their leaders were jailed, executed, or assassinated. Despite these flagrant injustices and the widening disparities between the haves and have-nots, the shah's grip on power seemed unshakable, as though he had deleted the very concept of dissent from the lexicon of political discourse in Iran.

According to the common wisdom in the historiography of the Iranian revolution, the elimination of the Marxist opposition and the regime's obsession with eradicating communism allowed Islamists, under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's leadership, to emerge as the pivotal force mobi-

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lizing the masses for an uprising. Although that might be partially true, SAVAK persecuted radical Islamists as violently and indiscriminately as it did the communists.

The advantage the Islamists enjoyed was the possibility of tapping into an already existing network of mosques that could be utilized as a grassroots means of organizing protests. By linking their political discourse and revolutionary ideology to familiar tropes of Shia rituals and religious convictions, Khomeini and his followers generated a mass movement that spread among men and women of different classes and regions. Their message of justice, delivered in the symbolic language of Shiism, also crossed religious boundaries and ideological commitments. Jews and Armenians subscribed to Khomeini's anticolonial call for justice. So did the communists and, in the final instance, the reluctant liberals.

The revolutionary movement confounded the experts with its intensity, its scope, and, most importantly, its nonconformity with existing conceptions of political upheaval. More than 12 percent of the entire population participated directly in the revolution, compared with 2.5 percent in France and only 1.5 percent in Russia. But by all accounts, Iran was not in a revolutionary condition. Despite the increasing numbers of the urban poor, the economy was not in crisis. The state had not lost its ability to govern, nor was there any discernible sign that the masses translated their social discontent into political defiance. The state wielded its coercive apparatus relentlessly, with considerable success in containing dissent. Occasional clashes between slum dwellers and police enforcing city regulations did not turn into a sustained mass movement with far-reaching political demands.

That is why structural questions concerning the revolution's causes and origins have increasingly been replaced in recent years by phenomenological questions about how the revolution was experienced. Causal explanations often rely on large structural models that neglect the contingencies that inform social action. In Iran, the revolution was led for the most part by those who benefited from the royal modernization projects, while the marginalized largely remained on the edges of the revolutionary struggle.

COMRADES IN ARMS

In his 1902 pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?* Lenin reminded his comrades, "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."

In Iran, too, there was a moment of transformation in the way people understood their place in the world. Iranians found themselves in a historical trajectory touched by the spirit of revolution. The turbulent two decades of the 1960s and 1970s, with their liberation movements and urban guerrilla warfare in Africa and Latin America, and finally the humiliating defeat of the United States in Vietnam, were readily present in the minds of the urban masses, and that exposure shaped the mode of revolutionary thought in Iran. The shah, Francisco Franco, Augusto Pinochet, Haile Selassie, Suharto, and others like them formed a global collective of tyrants that gave the struggle against oppression in Iran a cosmopolitan sensibility.

Informed by Marxian and Shia political philosophy, that worldly awareness was permeated by a historical consciousness that gave the struggle against the shah a distinct temporality. A new lexicon of revolutionary thought emerged in Iran, comparing the current confrontation to those between Moses and Pharaoh, Imam Hussein and the caliph Yazid I, the colonized and the colonizer, the exploited and exploiting classes, the *mustaz'af* (the Quranic term for the oppressed) and the *mustakbar* (oppressor). By drawing on universal struggles for justice anchored to distinct Iranian/Shia references, a class of intellectuals articulated a strain of revolutionary thought in Iran along the lines of what the political philosopher Massimiliano Tomba has recently described as "insurgent universality." It brought to life a dissident political culture that highlighted issues of social justice as the engine of the revolutionary movement, meaningful to both Islamists and Marxist-Leninists. The ideological context of the political expression of social justice demands seldom became a point of contention among Iranian revolutionary organizations.

The prolific Iranian philosopher of history and theologian Ali Shariati (1933–77) most effectively conveyed a revolutionary theory that was conscious of its particularities in a world-historical context. He borrowed freely from Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and Sukarno in order to render Shiism as a revolutionary ideology motivated by the struggle against injustice. He offered an alternative genealogy of Islamic tradition in which the defining moments were marked by action and struggle rather than doctrinal debates. Instead of a historical narrative based on philosophical discourses and theological disputes, Shariati's history of Islam consisted of a succession of martyrs and rebellions against

tyranny. He was inspired by the Pauls and Aarons of Islam, rather than by its Augustines and Maimonides; by those who chose Islam consciously; by those whose Islam was realized in exile, in prison, and on battlegrounds rather than in seminary quarters or in superstitious rituals. Shariati's new historiography of Islam was the basis for a revolutionary ideology.

Thanks to Shariati's legacy, for many years Muslim and Marxist revolutionaries regarded themselves as comrades in arms, upholding the same ideals, albeit with different ideologies. During his televised show trial in 1973, Khosrow Golesorkhi, a communist poet and journalist, put forward a poignant defense that resonated with many Iranian intellectuals who identified as part of an anti-imperialist and national liberation movement. He was executed a few months after he uttered these words:

As a Marxist-Leninist, I searched for social justice for the first time in the teachings of Islam and then I found socialism. . . . This is why I call Imam Ali the first socialist in world history. . . . We are ready to sacrifice our lives on behalf of our country's disinherited. Imam Hussein was in the minority, and Yazid enjoyed mansions, armies, state, and power. Hussein stood up and was martyred. Yazid occupied a small corner in history, but what has been repeated in history is the legacy of Hussein and his struggle, not the rule of Yazid. . . . As a Marxist I applaud such an Islam, the Islam of Ali, the Islam of Hussein.

In practice, the regime that was established to Islamize the political order rendered the creeds of Islam subject to political expediency.

Khomeini was a receptive audience for these young Marxist revolutionaries who believed that true Islam is manifested in a universal struggle against tyranny. Today it is hard to imagine the connection between the world that revolutionary impulse envisioned and the actuality it generated in the Islamic Republic.

CREATING THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

The story of the Iranian revolution—its causes and origins, hopes and objectives, scope and organization, failures and successes—has been written mainly by those who, now in exile, found themselves on the losing side of postrevolutionary politics. In this dominant narrative, the revolution unfolded with two competing factions in binary opposition along a secular versus Islamist divide.

The clerical faction led by Khomeini hijacked the revolution and sealed its leadership in the weeks preceding the final armed uprising in February 1979. The reign of terror it established after the revolution, according to this account, was nothing but the inevitable extension of the totalitarianism inherent in Islamist political philosophy.

Inside Iran, the official narratives have constructed another variation of the same binary opposition. They highlight the Islamic core of the revolutionary movement, and deem that it was necessary to rid the revolution of its unsolicited “secular” elements in order to build the postrevolutionary state. The state transformed the Islam of the revolutionary movement from an ideology of liberation and a highly symbolic language of justice to a series of doctrinal charges and formal/judicial injunctions. Commitment to these laws became the state's defining principle.

Both narratives rethink the revolution from the standpoint of its outcome, which was neither inevitable nor known at the time.

The majority of the clerics who composed the assembly that drafted the new constitution in 1979 entered the process without a clear mandate or well-defined agenda. On numerous occasions, senior clerics raised doubts about the entire process, indicating that they were not certain what their responsibilities were. In response to one ayatollah who expressed reservations about the possibility of framing an Islamic constitution, Mohammad Beheshti, the vice president of the assembly and one of the main architects of the Islamic Republic, stated that instead of reading Ayatollah Khomeini's *Islamic Governance*, the respected members of the assembly should read the Soviet, Chinese, and Bulgarian constitutions in order to appreciate the fact that “what we do in Iran is not unprecedented.”

But once the constitution was ratified and the state devised its means of governance, the preferred precedent was no longer found in Bulgaria or China. The new state became the embodiment of the Islamic state as envisioned by the Prophet himself. The contingencies of the process and the contextual concerns of its founding moment were stripped away. The official narrative linked the formation of the new state to a continuous movement that stretched from the time of the Prophet to the triumph of the revolution.

The revolutionary state moved swiftly to consolidate power and purge competing political parties, particularly those on the left. Liberal parties were also swept aside, despite the fact that Khomeini had appointed a respected liberal politician, Mehdi Bazargan, to head the provisional government. In the summer of 1980, the Iraqi invasion of Iran began a war that would last eight years and take the lives of more than half a million people on both sides combined. It also helped the young regime solidify its grip on power. The war ended the possibility of dissent by making it easier for the government to justify its repressive policies under a state of wartime emergency. While unifying the entire nation against a common enemy, the war also interrupted the vibrant conversations about the nature and features of the new Islamic polity.

Although the revolutionary state sanctified itself as the extension of the Prophet's rule, in practice it followed a socialist-informed agenda. It dispensed swift revolutionary justice for the key members of the ancien régime; disbanded the old military and replaced it with a revolutionary corps and mass militia; nationalized big industries and banks; supported the formation of Islamic workers' councils and allowed them to control the production and management of factories; and redistributed land. The left understood the revolution as part of a universal struggle against imperialism and American neocolonialism, and the Islamic Republic heeded that sentiment. One result was the takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and the ensuing hostage crisis.

The radicalization of the postrevolutionary state turned power struggles into irreconcilable antagonisms. The main opposition organization, the Mujahedin-e Khalq, assassinated hundreds of state officials, including the president, the prime minister, the head of the judiciary, and scores of legislators. The state undertook a decade-long campaign of terror, with mass executions, imprisonment, exile, and extrajudicial killings of members of the opposition. Many on the margins of those violent politics were caught up in the fray.

Despite political instability, wartime economic disaster, and inexperience in governance, the Islamic Republic, inspired by the revolutionaries' socialist ideals and common commitment to projects of social justice, instituted one of the largest

welfare states in the world. It invested in primary and secondary education, a robust public health plan, and infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, and utility networks.

The state implemented these plans with deeply gendered prejudice. One of the very first policies that the revolutionary state enacted in 1979 was to abolish the Family Protection Law, enacted in 1967, which had increased the minimum age of marriage to 18 for women and 20 for men, recognized women's right to divorce, and imposed restrictions on polygamy. The clergy always considered the law to be an unacceptable extension of the state's authority into family affairs, a domain that the clerical establishment insisted must remain under its own purview.

The new state also imposed restrictions on women's mobility and made it mandatory for them to wear the hijab (headscarf) in public places. Given these blatant gender biases, most experts expected to see a considerable decline in women's status in Iran. But remarkable improvements across a range of indicators told a different story as the state's massive social transformation project reached into the remotest parts of the country.

The female literacy rate rose from 35 percent in 1978 to 74 percent in 1996. By 2006, only 4 percent of young women remained illiterate. Health and prenatal care also dramatically improved. Women's life expectancy increased from 58 years on the eve of the revolution to 72 by 1999. Infant mortality decreased from 89 per 1,000 in 1979 to 13 in 2016.

An aggressive new family planning and population control program, instituted in 1989, reduced the population growth rate from a high of 3.4 percent in 1986 to 0.7 percent in 2007. During the same period, the average number of children per family dropped from 6.5 to less than 2.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

As soon as the new constitution was ratified in a December 1979 referendum, different branches of the government, particularly the legislative branch, faced its inherent contradictions in practice. The constitution envisioned a government with two distinct sources of legitimacy: the electorate and divine will, as expressed in Islamic jurisprudence and interpreted by the clergy. It mandated that every piece of legislation had to comply

A global collective of tyrants gave the struggle against oppression in Iran a cosmopolitan sensibility.

with sharia law, and it delegated the Guardian Council—composed of six senior clerics, appointed by the supreme leader, and six lawyers with expertise in Islamic jurisprudence, appointed by the head of the judiciary and approved by the Majlis (parliament)—to adjudicate the terms of that compliance.

The constitution also institutionalized *velayat-e faqih*, or the rule of the jurist, and created the office of the supreme leader with inexhaustible authority over the country's affairs. The constitution incorporated checks and balances to this authority, but in practice, especially after Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989, those safeguards proved to be ineffective.

In a letter to Khomeini dated September 27, 1981, Hashemi Rafsanjani, the influential former speaker of the Majlis and a founding member of the Islamic Republic Party (he would later serve as president), lamented the new regime's struggles to conform social policy to abstract concepts of jurisprudence. Rafsanjani complained to the supreme leader that the Guardian Council struck down the majority of the parliament's legislation as un-Islamic. He said, "Under these circumstances, based on the teachings of sharia, many policies of the government would be unjustifiable." Rafsanjani closed by posing the question, "How is it possible to govern this country based on the existing interpretations of sharia?"

Khomeini responded that there was no contradiction between addressing contemporary practical necessities and respecting the "primary creeds" of sharia. Indeed, under Islamic government, the former takes precedence over the latter, he said. Khomeini also prepared the way for a forthright separation of the roles played by the traditional Shia hierarchy and the elected Majlis in the determination of these necessities. In a speech to the Majlis, he delegated the responsibility for determining Islamically sanctioned policies and legislation to a two-thirds majority of the Majlis. Other grand ayatollahs received Khomeini's controversial decision with great skepticism and warned him of the dire consequences of integrating an elected political institution into the process of interpretive engagements with the religious text, known as *ijtihad*.

Before his death in 1989, Khomeini took steps toward establishing the primacy of political over religious considerations as a core principle of the Islamic Republic. In one of his last and most controversial *fatwas*, he laid the foundation of a re-

public in which the preservation and interests of the state would eclipse the ordained obligations and duties prescribed in sharia. The expediencies of the political order, he insisted, take precedence over the mandates of religion. In a letter to then-President Ali Khamenei, he stated that governance "is one of the primary injunctions of Islam and has priority over all other secondary injunctions, even prayer, fasting, and the *hajj*."

In practice, the regime that was established to Islamize the political order rendered the creeds of Islam subject to political expediency and the pragmatic considerations of statecraft. After the revolution, Islam turned into a discourse whose meaning was articulated by parliamentarians, lawyers, lay theologians, and civil society activists (including women's rights advocates); it was no longer taken to be a series of guiding principles for which the clerical establishment held exclusive interpretive authority.

For centuries before the Islamic revolution, the Shia clergy had promoted political quietism. As long as the seminaries maintained independence from the royal court in their internal affairs, the clerics seldom entered the political sphere. Indeed, that remained one of the most significant points of contention between Sunni and Shia clerical institutions: the former operated as an extension of the state and relied on its resources, and the latter shut its doors to the encroachments of shahs and caliphs. Paradoxically, as one observer pointed out, the Islamic Republic inadvertently Sunnified Shiism by making the seminaries subservient to the will of the state.

DEMOCRACY IRANIAN-STYLE

Often the Islamic Republic is characterized as a theocracy, a misnomer that ignores the complexities of state politics in Iran. Although there is a supreme leader, presidential and parliamentary elections remain key elements in generating political legitimacy. Elections are neither inconsequential nor a sham, as many observers believe.

Conventional wisdom in Iran considers a turnout of 60 percent of eligible voters to be dangerously low in a presidential election. Voters typically demonstrate a level of enthusiasm that is difficult to imagine being inspired by a race for a "meaningless" position, as one *New York Times* columnist described the Iranian presidency. No one in Iran is coerced to participate in elections. Voting has become a part of Iranian political culture. Voters may boycott elections or participate in them, but

in either case they consider elections to be a form of effective political participation. That is why, after the disputed 2009 presidential election, millions of Iranians marched on the streets of major cities holding signs that read, “Where is my vote?”

Democracy is an ongoing project—as political theorist Chantal Mouffe once wrote, it “always entails drawing a frontier between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ those who belong to the ‘demos’ and those who are outside of it.” Democracy has never been invented and implemented anywhere as a complete system of rights. Rather, it always poses a point of contention over the boundaries of the inside and the outside. Gaining formal rights to run for office does not guarantee inclusion in democratic processes. Democracy Iranian-style allows the Guardian Council to prohibit women and those with allegedly questionable commitments to the Islamic Republic from running for president. The constitution does not explicitly bar female candidates, but a deeply rooted patriarchy informs Iranian laws and shapes the minds of those in charge of interpreting them.

Yet what appears to critics of the postrevolutionary regime as a homogeneous group of “traditionalists,” “fundamentalists,” or “fanatics” is in fact a collection of disparate groups with divergent tendencies and competing visions for the future of the Islamic Republic. These groups share neither a conception of Islamic ideals nor a unified perception of the rules of governance. The intentional ambiguities in Khomeini’s declarations and his masterful navigation between theological issues and the expediencies of maintaining the regime perpetuated the coexistence of these factions, even after his death. One might ask why, forty years after the revolution, there is still not a stable, uniform regime in Iran. The answer can be found in the diversity of the revolutionary coalition that overthrew the monarchy, and in the way Khomeini held this coalition together.

Every presidential election in Iran elicits fundamental questions about the meaning and purpose of the Islamic Republic. This in turn leads to a carnival atmosphere that coalesces electoral process with the populism of street politics. These eruptions of Iranian-style democracy reflect the

fact that the president plays a constitutive role in devising domestic and foreign policies. Although limited in its scope, the authority of the president extends far beyond merely carrying out the wishes of the supreme leader.

REVOLUTIONARY INHERITORS

The first generation of revolutionary leaders is either dead or long since purged, or have become strangers to the ideals that once informed their political commitments. The Revolutionary Guard, which was established to defend the principles of the revolution, has turned into a conglomerate of investment companies and subcontractors whose main preoccupation is securing access to and monopolizing economic resources. Iranian newspapers are filled with reports of corruption at the highest levels of government. Through informal financial networks, insiders exploit the unjust economic sanctions imposed by the United States for personal gain.

The future of the Islamic Republic will not be decided in the boardrooms of government buildings, the chambers of the Majlis, or the offices of the supreme leader. The most significant consequence of the 1979 revolution has been the unprecedented expansion of civil society in Iran. Women actively participate in the public sphere, from cultural affairs to legal activism, journalism, and education (60 percent of university students are women). There is also an unprecedented exposure to intellectual debate, deeper appreciation of Islamic thought, reexamination of Iranian history, and critical engagement with Western and Eastern traditions in philosophy, the arts, and cultures via an energetic translation industry and vibrant cinema, theater, fine arts, and literature.

The very notion of rights has been transformed today in Iran from an abstract concept of political philosophy to something with which citizens concretely identify. Perhaps most important to them is the right of self-determination—against both a state that implacably resists calls to show greater respect for the demands of its constituents, and a neocolonial world order that relentlessly imposes its own wishes on the sovereignty of a nation that is not willing to relinquish its independence. ■

“[N]ew forms of governance in the Gulf work through identity projects that include (and often co-opt) difference to gain legitimacy.”

Capitalizing on Cosmopolitanism in the Gulf

NATALIE KOCH

Abu Dhabi's new Louvre Museum opened its doors in November 2017 with an event attended by French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife, and hosted by the emirate's ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. Ten years earlier, the government of Abu Dhabi had signed a \$525 million deal with the French museum to use the “Louvre” name for 30 years, plus an additional \$750 million for management support.

The building was designed by the eminent French architect Jean Nouvel, whose website describes it as “a project founded on a major symbol of Arab architecture: the dome.” But Nouvel emphasizes that this is no traditional dome. It is a modern dome, with a latticed design that allows for both shade and “bursts of sun.”

Just across the Gulf sits another brand-new, Nouvel-designed museum, also said to be a modern take on a traditional theme—the “desert rose.” This is the National Museum of Qatar, which opened in March 2019. Like Abu Dhabi's Louvre, it has been lavishly funded by the government. Numbers are hard to come by, but the museum's eclectic and complicated design and extended construction delays suggest a cost far higher than the initial price tag of \$434 million set in a 2011 contract.

Other Western architects (or their firms, at least) have been engaged in building museums in the hydrocarbon-rich states of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Among these museums is a Frank Gehry–designed Guggenheim set to open in the UAE in the next few years (projected in 2010 to cost \$800 million).

The first of the Arabian Peninsula's iconic museums was I. M. Pei's Museum of Islamic Art, which opened in 2008 in Doha. The famous Chinese-American architect toured the Muslim architectural world for inspiration, including visits to Spain, India, Syria, Tunisia, and Egypt. He ultimately landed on a Cubist design familiar to anyone who knows his work, but which he explained was meant to evoke an “abstract vision of the key design elements of Islamic architecture.”

In each case, the vision that these Western men profess to build into the urban landscape of the capital cities of the UAE and Qatar is devoted, above all, to modernity. The architects make gestures to local Arab heritage, but play up the idea of the new museums as icons of a more global, more gleaming cosmopolitan modernity. The Guggenheim website, for example, explains: “From its location in the Middle East—a central axis between Europe, Asia, and Africa—the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will contribute to a more inclusive and expansive view of art history that emphasizes the convergence of local, regional, and international sources of creative inspiration rather than geography or nationality.” This museum, like its siblings in the Gulf region, aims to be an icon of cosmopolitanism.

The museums are not alone: spectacular urbanization projects across the Arabian Peninsula have been described in largely similar terms, as places where cosmopolitan ideals are not just practiced by welcoming people from all backgrounds, but also inscribed onto every urban edifice. These cosmopolitan narratives are especially significant for understanding governance in the Gulf because of the region's unique demographic configuration. In Qatar and the UAE, citizens account for a minority of under 10 percent of the countries' total populations. The other 90 percent of their residents are noncitizen expatriates who will never have a chance to gain the full rights of citizenship.

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Critics have accordingly pointed to the contradictions of characterizing the Gulf states as cosmopolitan, emphasizing instead that they are predicated on reinforcing rather than challenging exclusivist citizenship regimes. They often simply stop there, content with unmasking such claims as “false.” Yet this critique is hardly a great revelation: nation-building efforts across the region have always been predicated on strict *jus sanguinis* citizenship regimes, determined by parentage.

Merely highlighting the exclusivism of Gulf societies hides their inclusivism. Instead, by taking the narratives of cosmopolitanism in the region seriously, and asking who uses them and why, we can gain a better sense of new forms of governance in the Gulf, which work through identity projects that include (and often co-opt) difference to gain legitimacy.

It is worth emphasizing that cosmopolitanism isn't new in the Gulf. Before, during, and since colonialism, the Arabian Peninsula has had highly diverse societies. Cosmopolitan ideas and realities have always been built into the cityscapes of places such as Abu Dhabi and Doha, thanks in no small part to their historic roles as trading ports linking South Asia, the Middle East, and parts beyond.

Yet there is something different about the new, spectacular, monumentally scaled projects like the UAE's Louvre and Guggenheim, and the Qatar National Museum. The manner in which certain actors use them may suggest a unique perspective on governance that capitalizes (on) cosmopolitanism to validate particular kinds of exclusion. That is, “cosmopolitanism” in this configuration is both capitalized as an economic source of power, and capitalized on as a political source of power. In both cases, this is made possible through the logic of iconicity.

CONCRETE ICONS

All icons are designed to be consumed. They focalize and concretize intangible concepts. In other words, they give material form and sharper focus to an idea that is otherwise too diffuse, tenuous, or abstract to visualize. But if this focalization effect implies an audience, then who are the consumers of these icons of cosmopolitanism? And who are the sellers? Why are Gulf governments investing so heavily in such projects? What stories are they trying to tell about their countries, themselves,

and their people? Lastly, who is profiting? And who isn't?

Financial flows are a significant part of the story, of course, but focusing on money alone would leave us unmoored. To understand the curiously extravagant efforts to concretize cosmopolitanism in the Gulf, we also need to examine the political, social, and cultural geographies underpinning them. These efforts are not limited to museums, but include investments in other major cultural institutions, like impressive new university campuses and research facilities, as well as music halls and sporting venues, international convention centers, airports, seaports, and more.

To be cosmopolitan is to be free from local or national attachments or prejudices. It means, the dictionary suggests, to be at home or feel a sense of belonging all over the world. But is cosmopolitanism merely a pragmatic “mode of managing multiplicities” (as the scholars Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen put it), a personal identity or disposition, an ethical framework, or something else?

Rather than search for an essence of cosmopolitanism, we can learn far more by tracing how the concept is politicized. To understand cosmopolitan ideals, we have to look to the political contention manifested in the ways that different actors

describe and debate cosmopolitanism, enact it or reject it, build it into their museums or constitutions, adopt it as an elite worldliness or an egalitarian community-building exercise, or otherwise work with its slippery potentialities.

Among today's philosophers and political theorists, cosmopolitanism is most often discussed as a normative framework rooted in inclusivity rather than exclusivity—whether defined by nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, language, territorial belonging, religion, or any other kind of essentialist identity politics. In contemporary usage, the idea most commonly indicates a politics of transcending identities defined by the borders of territorial states. In this sense, cosmopolitanism would seem to imply a kind of identity politics running counter to nationalism. Yet this is not the case: cosmopolitanism has long been a key theme in nationalist storylines around the world.

NATIONALIST SCRIPTS

Notwithstanding the triumphalist postnational visions that flourished after the end of the Cold

*Cosmopolitanism
isn't new in
the Gulf.*

War, the world is still organized around territorial states. Governments presiding over these states still seek to root their legitimacy in the idea of a nation. Nationalisms take many forms, and scholars have loosely slotted them on a spectrum: on one end is a type more strongly “ethnic” in its conception of who constitutes the nation; on the other is a more “civic” type of nationalism. In the former, kinship, family lineage, or ethnic identity defines how the nation is imagined; in the latter, a territorial or ideological narrative of unity is the binding glue.

In practice, all nationalisms have multiple scripts or storylines. This is readily apparent in the United States, where there have long been competing nationalist storylines around religion: one claims that America is a “Christian nation,” while another says that it is committed to religious freedom and diversity. Likewise, the civic nationalist “melting pot” storyline coexists with the ethnic nationalist storyline of white supremacy. Cosmopolitanism, in a context like this, is harnessed by individuals and institutions seeking to promote a more civic vision of the nation. Their nationalist icons are icons of cosmopolitanism: not the monuments to Confederate generals or the Ten Commandments in granite, but Lady Liberty in New York Harbor.

There is also a long history of nation-building agendas developed around cosmopolitan ideals beyond the United States. They have figured prominently in certain nationalist storylines in Canada, France, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Jordan, and many other countries. And with each set of civic storylines come the usual icons that focalize and concretize them. Sometimes these are architectural; other times they are sculptural. They may be lavishly expensive, or they may be modest. And they can involve short-lived rituals like parades, or drawn-out exercises of social mobilization like military conscription or the construction of new cities.

Icons of cosmopolitanism, in short, can and do take many forms. So what makes such projects in the UAE and Qatar stand out? Or put another way, is there something fundamentally different about how cosmopolitan identity narratives are being advanced and broadcast in the Gulf?

Although they have been embroiled in an intense feud since 2017, the UAE and Qatar have much in common. Like other countries, they have overlapping and competing scripts of nationalism. Some are more ethnic and others more civic in orientation. As

I have found in my research on Gulf National Days and other local expressions of nationalism, civic nationalist narratives informed by cosmopolitan logic are not only present, but also incredibly powerful in the two countries. Paradoxically, though, these storylines are advanced just as much (or perhaps more) for noncitizens as for citizens.

Examples abound. One of the most vivid was on display in Qatar’s 2013 National Day theme of “OneLove,” represented by a logo of two differently colored hands to symbolize Qataris and foreign residents. And each year’s holiday in both countries brings a new effort to achieve a Guinness world record to further broadcast how inclusive they are. On the UAE’s National Day in 2014, the country broke the world record for most nationalities singing one anthem at one time (119!), a feat the *Gulf News* described as signifying “the diversity and tolerance of the country.” Similar media accounts are common across the region during the holidays. They are part of much broader civic nationalist storylines that frame tolerance and diversity as core values in Qatar and the UAE.

Surprising as it may seem to outside observers, Qatari and Emirati nationalist storylines actively include noncitizen expats. Most people (academics and lay observers alike) would assume that nationalism is for nationals. Since most countries in the world have only a tiny minority who are noncitizens, it may seem obvious that nation-building projects are always designed with citizens in mind. Citizens are, after all, the social community from which most governments derive their legitimacy. But in Qatar and the UAE, governments derive much of their legitimacy from the noncitizens who comprise 90 percent of residents. This awkward fact is never stated so explicitly locally, but it is constantly alluded to by the profuse expressions of civic nationalism in cosmopolitan storylines.

RECONFIGURING INCLUSION

Narratives and practices aimed at fostering expat inclusion are prevalent not just because cosmopolitan ideals make for good public relations (they certainly do), but also because noncitizens are the backbone of the Arabian Peninsula’s political economy. Some Qatari and Emirati citizens do not favor this situation, though, and certain exclusivist ethnic nationalist scripts cast doubt on the rights—and right to belong—of noncitizens. But noncitizens do belong. Many of them develop a deep emotional bond with their adopted home, laboring in service of the state or the range of corporate actors that

allow the Gulf economies to thrive. Others may not develop any kind of emotional attachment, but they nonetheless bolster local economies by paying the costs of making a life in the Gulf's rapidly developing cities, however fleetingly.

All nations, as the sociologist Rogers Brubaker has argued, are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive; they simply differ in terms of the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. In the Gulf states, strict *jus sanguinis* citizenship regimes have led to a unique demographic balance. Yet the noncitizens who form the overwhelming majority of the population are not only excluded; they are differently included. Or rather, in contrast to Western conceptions of the relationship between citizenship and a "proper" state configuration, these citizenship regimes are differently inclusive. Much of what Western media interpret as Gulf efforts to promote a cosmopolitan identity project merely for PR purposes is geared toward challenging this hegemonic interpretation of citizenship.

The basic configuration of who is accorded the rights and entitlements of citizenship in the Gulf will not change any time soon, but local leaders and their allies have actively harnessed the power of spectacle and iconicity to advance their claims to being cosmopolites. Massive projects like the Louvre and the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi, the Qatar National Museum, designer stadiums for the 2022 World Cup, and countless others are promoted by the ruling families as correctives to Western interpretations of the region, which treat their societies as provincial and exclusionary on the basis of their citizenship regimes.

A 2010 *New York Times* article by the paper's architecture critic on the new Qatari and Emirati museums is telling. Titled "Building Museums, and a Fresh Arab Identity," the piece opens with a bold assertion: "It is an audacious experiment: two small, oil-rich countries in the Middle East are using architecture and art to reshape their national identities virtually overnight, and in the process to redeem the tarnished image of Arabs abroad while showing the way toward a modern society within the boundaries of Islam." The article goes on to suggest that leaders in Qatar and the UAE risk "alienating significant parts of the Arab world" with their embrace of "Western-oriented cosmopolitanism that flourished in places like Cairo and Tehran not so long ago, and that helped fuel the rise of militant fundamentalism."

As Orientalist and problematic as this binary narrative of cultural opposites is, the *Times* article

represents precisely the kind of coverage that Gulf leaders have sought. Indeed, this story is one of many about the spectacular urban developments across the region following the same script: visionary leaders are using their lavish wealth to lead the way on a new path to modernity, and buck the provincial trappings of Islam, sectarianism, and national prejudice prevailing in their region. This story ultimately reaffirms the comforting narrative of a cosmopolitan Occident juxtaposed against a backward Orient, which still prevails in Western media coverage of the Middle East.

MORE COSMOPOLITAN THAN THOU

Another staple of this Western narrative is the West's commitment to exposing human rights violations and holding violators to account. Here, the Gulf's icons of cosmopolitanism come up against the double bind of any iconic project: just as an icon concretizes a narrative that its author wants to advance, it also affords critics something to pin their grievances on. When the Soviet Union fell, so did many Stalin and Lenin statues. And when the United States invaded Iraq, a statue of Saddam Hussein was among the first things to be torn asunder.

The Gulf's iconic development projects have likewise been subject to attack. Instead of treating them as signs of cosmopolitanism and modernity, critics have condemned the museum projects, stadiums, university projects, and more for using slave labor. Although labor problems abound—the region's *kafala* (sponsorship) system for migrant workers gives employers broad discretion, and some withhold their workers' passports—the slave labor storyline is essentialist and inaccurate. Few of the region's millions of workers are subject to such egregious violations, and many migrant workers are quite well-off.

Like any trope, the slave labor narrative sticks because it is evocative—not because it captures the nuance of the unfamiliar structure of inequalities that defines the Gulf's complicated labor politics. It is also a satisfying narrative for Western audiences, giving them a chance to feel more cosmopolitan than thou. After all, influential news outlets like the *New York Times* promote their own nationalist narratives, often in contrast with foreign nationalisms. As the sociologist Michael Billig says of nationalist orators, they dress up the imagined national audience in "rhetorical finery" and then "hold a mirror so the nation can admire itself."

While the Gulf nationalist storylines frame spectacular development projects as icons of cosmopolitanism and modernity, and reject Western claims to a superior form of cosmopolitanism, foreign media critiques consistently come back to this old Orientalist vision of a bifurcated world of the “real” protectors of human rights and enlightenment, and the insincere pretenders. One curious aspect of this clash of nationalisms around the Gulf’s iconic projects, though, is how the star foreign architects have come under attack—and how they have pushed back.

A *New York Review of Books* article criticized Zaha Hadid for disregarding working conditions and the rights of migrant workers at the Al-Wakrah Stadium in Qatar, set to be a World Cup venue. In 2014, Hadid sued the journal for defamation and won: the article alleged that workers had died on a project that had not even begun. Likewise, various US and British outlets (such as the *Observer*, the *Guardian*, and the *New York Times*) have asserted that construction projects at the Abu Dhabi Louvre and the nearby New York University (NYU) branch campus were marred by “modern-day slavery,” drawing on a 2015 Human Rights Watch report. Jean Nouvel flatly rejected these assertions about the Louvre and claimed that the conditions in Abu Dhabi were actually better than those for some workers employed in Europe.

Frank Gehry and the Guggenheim director, Richard Armstrong, have also responded to efforts to boycott their new Abu Dhabi museum by rejecting claims of labor abuses as exaggerated, and publicly announced a set of standards for workers’ rights on the project. NYU-Abu Dhabi and a number of other Western institutions involved in these projects have taken similar steps. The Western planners and administrators are trying to get ahead of a potential (or real) PR firestorm, but they are also cultivating an image of themselves as enlightened actors who are uniquely positioned to offer Gulf states a model for doing things right.

The colonial logic of this narrative is glaring, but in justifying their involvement in these high-profile projects, the foreign architects and others bolster the idea that what they are building really is an icon of cosmopolitanism—not an icon of oppression, as detractors suggest. By continuing to invest in these high-profile projects, the leaders of Qatar and the UAE are not only waging a PR battle

over this “more cosmopolitan than thou” issue by building the narrative of cosmopolitanism into the urban fabric—they are also recruiting powerful allies among the global cultural elite’s foremost influencers.

None of this is to say that the commitment to cosmopolitan ideals in the Gulf is somehow false. In any context, there are some actors who truly believe in an ideological value system, others who are outright skeptics, and still others who understand the financial, political, or social rewards of engaging with it. The value being concretized in the process of building an icon is not necessarily internalized by the builders and the viewers. Americans know that Lady Liberty stands for the nationalist self-understanding of a people who value freedom. But this does not mean Americans actually internalize and act on that value. Some may, some may not.

Some Qataris may look at Doha’s new desert rose-inspired museum and feel proud of their modern country, which cherishes its past but is open to bringing in the world’s leading architects and leading the way to a cosmopolitan future for the Arabian Peninsula. Some Emiratis may feel the same way when they see the new museums on Saadiyat Island. Noncitizen residents in Qatar and the UAE may also see these icons in the same light. Yet others, citizens and noncitizens alike, may dismiss the icons because they personally reject the cosmopolitan ideals behind them, or simply see them as false assertions.

Since nationalisms are inherently contested, and each place will have multiple scripts competing to be the “correct” vision of national identity, there will always be dissent. This does not mean that an icon can be judged as a failure or a success. Rather, icons work as a trope that organizes political speech and defines the contours of a political landscape that people must navigate. Whether working in service of or against that value system, an icon gives people something to which they can pin their aspirations or critiques. Such is the case with the icons of cosmopolitanism in the Gulf today. They focalize the narrative of cosmopolitanism in the built environment, but they also help organize political speech, domestically and internationally.

Another aspect of the focalization effect of icons is that it works to divert attention from more dif-

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of the Arabian Peninsula’s
political economy.*

fuse issues. By fixing attention in one strategically defined place, icons help shape, or at least clutter, the conversation. One of the many unspectacular issues that might not be getting due attention as a result is the violence done to the environment as staggering amounts of natural resources are poured into lavish cities of empty towers where there should be none.

Another is the extent to which these projects are facilitated by substantial and sustained flows between “democratic” and “authoritarian” countries. Critics in the West are well versed in decrying authoritarian states and their allies with the familiar language of liberal norms, including human rights and free speech. But the attacks launched at the Emirati or Qatari governments, or the likes of Hadid, Nouvel, or Gehry, do not go to the heart of a global political economy and geopolitical order that are built on a fiction of democratic and authoritarian countries existing as separate units.

COSMOPOLITANISM COMMODIFIED

The global system is one of exchange, just as it always has been. Although diversity and global connectedness are not at all new in the Arabian Peninsula, they are politicized differently today. State-based and private actors have learned to work together in pursuing their sometimes mutually supporting, sometimes competing agendas and strategic goals. In both spheres, astute players have handily learned to capitalize (on) cosmopolitanism. And to do so, they routinely work across borders and with borders: using them when it serves the cosmopolitan narrative and ignoring them when it doesn't.

This far-reaching capitalization of cosmopolitanism is what sets apart the identity narratives being advanced and broadcast in the Gulf states from other cases in history. Of course, large sums of money are available to the region's governments because these states control substantial hydrocarbon reserves. But money alone does not an iconic project make. And money is not the only resource that might measure its value. How should we compare the \$800 million price tag of a new Guggenheim museum with the cost of Stalin's Moscow metro project or his steel city in Magnitogorsk, built as they were with massive gulag labor campaigns and untold resources stripped from Soviet land? The point is rather that cosmopolitanism has been transformed into a commodity that individuals and institutions, local and foreign alike,

are buying and selling in the course of doing business in the Gulf, and deploying in the tricky business of legitimating their political regimes.

In his 2009 book *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, David Harvey suggests that cosmopolitan narratives arise through one of three mechanisms: philosophical reflection, the ferment of social movements, or practical demands for basic human needs. There is some irony that this comes from a famous Marxist geographer, since he seems to exclude the possibility of actors harnessing and commodifying the idea of cosmopolitanism. Yet this is plain to see in the Gulf, both in the most basic economic sense, as with high-flying architects recycling tired clichés to sell their projects, and in a broader political sense of authoritarian regimes that recognize the power of the concept and use it in systematic PR campaigns designed to deflect critical narratives from the Western media about their countries' supposed backwardness, violations of labor rights, and exclusionary citizenship regimes.

The Gulf's spectacular development projects shed light on new forms of governance in the Middle East insofar as they point to the uniquely configured partnerships of corporate/state and foreign/domestic actors that bolster an authoritarian system through a cosmopolitanism of strategic exclusions. As a civic nationalist storyline, this vision of cosmopolitanism actually does include noncitizens in the body politic and promote certain forms of belonging and participation for them. But the governments of the Arabian Peninsula have no reason to radically alter the citizenship regimes that afford them and a select group of citizens so many privileges.

Rather, the Gulf's cosmopolitanism of strategic exclusions requires that noncitizens and corporate allies learn to parrot the message that cosmopolitan ideals are being realized despite, or perhaps even through, their exclusion from the rights of citizenship. The nationalist storyline not only requires, but also entrenches an exclusivist citizenship regime. And just as countless actors in the region and beyond have reaped the financial and political rewards of mobilizing cosmopolitan rhetoric, so too are they capitalizing on and profiting from a system of noncitizenship. This cosmopolitanism of strategic exclusions is what easy liberal critiques of the spectacular urban projects miss. But it is now etched into the fabric of contemporary Gulf cities. ■

“These two minority communities have to work within the confines of ethnonationalist states that question their right to participate in the political system.”

Pushing for a Political Breakthrough: Kurds in Turkey and Palestinians in Israel

LOUIS FISHMAN

In this year's Turkish and Israeli elections, Kurdish citizens of Turkey and Palestinian citizens of Israel—ethnic minorities who make up approximately 20 percent of each country's population—captured international headlines. In both countries, these minorities' votes have become a key component in the newfound success of the main opposition parties in challenging the dominance that the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, have established over their respective societies. In Turkey, for the first time since 1994, the opposition snatched control of Istanbul away from Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP), a victory that would have been impossible without the Kurdish vote. In Israel's second general election of the year, held in September, higher turnout by Palestinian citizens denied Netanyahu and his right-wing bloc a clear path to form a new government and extend his 10 years in power.

Erdoğan and Netanyahu each tried to capture the ultranationalist vote in an attempt to counter losses in other areas, while also seeking to delegitimize the parties that are the foremost representatives of these two minorities. Erdoğan and the AKP directed a war of words against the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), while in Israel, Netanyahu and his Likud party kept up a nonstop attack against the Joint List. Erdoğan regularly refers to HDP leaders as “terrorists,” while Netanyahu recently claimed that members of the Joint List “glorify terrorists that murder our soldiers and citizens.” During the course of the 2019 election campaigns, Kurdish Turks and Palestinian Israelis were subjected to racist rhetoric—blatant hate speech—

from their nations' leaders and pro-government factions.

The emergence of the Kurds and Palestinians as major players in national politics should not come as a surprise. Both groups have worked for decades through legal channels to build public legitimacy. However, Turkey and Israel are not liberal democracies in which the majority recognizes the equal rights of minorities. These two minority communities have to work within the confines of ethnonationalist states that question their right to participate in the political system. Subjected to institutional and social discrimination, both groups are seen as outsiders in a game that is not their own.

While Erdoğan and Netanyahu's attacks on these minorities have noticeably increased over the past few years as the parties representing them gain clout, animosity toward them is not restricted to right-wing and ultranationalist voters. It is also found among the Turkish and Israeli populations at large. This makes the recent cooperation of Kurdish and Palestinian parties with the mainstream opposition parties even more remarkable.

SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL

Both Turkey and Israel are ethnic nation-states that give preference to the dominant identity—whether Turkishness or Jewishness—over a universal sense of citizenship. Kurdish citizens of Turkey, in order to integrate into the national polity, must subordinate aspects of their ethnic identity to conform with Turkish national identity. This is most evident when it comes to the issue of language, particularly in the public sphere. For most of the Turkish Republic's history, it has been forbidden to register Kurdish names, and at times speaking Kurdish outside of the home has been banned. Unlike in Israel, where the first language

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of study for Palestinian citizens is Arabic, Kurdish has never been taught in Turkish public schools, though Kurdish activists have demanded it for decades. The current government has continued to staunchly oppose Kurdish-language instruction. In the Turkish constitution, all citizens are defined as being “Turks.” Erdoğan has made no move to change this in his 17 years in office, despite hopes that he might in the beginning of his tenure as prime minister, when bans on speaking Kurdish in the public sphere were lifted as the AKP government implemented reforms to meet conditions for European Union membership.

The Israeli state defines itself as a Jewish state based on Zionism. Accordingly, the Palestinians in Israel are defined as what they are not—“non-Jewish minorities”—and have no special rights as an ethnic minority. Today’s Palestinian citizens are the remnants and descendants of those who were not among the 700,000 Palestinians forced out in 1948 during Israel’s founding and the first Arab-Israeli War (or who left of their own accord and were not allowed to return), which became known as the *Nakba* (catastrophe). The 100,000 Palestinians—comprising Muslims, Christians, and Druze—who stayed in the territory that would become Israel received Israeli citizenship. They were officially recognized as “Israeli Arabs,” a term that erases their connection with the land, not to mention their ties with their relatives who became refugees, with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and with the Palestinian diaspora at large.

Although the Israeli Declaration of Independence calls on Arab citizens to participate in the state’s institutions and promises them equal citizenship, they have long been subjected to legal discrimination. The Nation-State Law enacted in 2018 reinforces this discrimination: it recognizes the Jewish people as the sole group having national ties to the land. This law outraged not only Palestinian-Israelis, but also the small Druze community—who, unlike their Arab counterparts, are subject to compulsory military service and have supported the Israeli state since its founding (though a minority of Druze do not and embrace a Palestinian identity). The Nation-State Law affirms the official status of existing symbols with which Palestinian citizens cannot identify, such as the national flag and anthem, which are both in-

herently Jewish in nature. Arabic was once a de facto official language alongside Hebrew, but its status, too, has been downgraded by the new law.

ARMED STRUGGLE

Kurds in Turkey and Palestinian citizens of Israel are inevitably viewed as being linked to national movements at war with their states. Among the majority, each group is widely perceived as comprising a fifth column undermining the nation.

The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) was formed in 1978. Led by Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK quickly evolved from a student-based organization into a guerrilla force waging an armed struggle for an independent Kurdistan. The Turkish military hit back in the 1990s, and the Kurdish civilian population in the southeast paid the price. Estimates of the number of dead in Turkish-Kurdish violence range from 30,000 to 40,000 (which far surpasses the death toll in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the same period). Hundreds of thousands of Kurds were displaced, making their way as

internal refugees to shantytowns in Turkey’s western cities, such as Istanbul, Izmir, and the capital, Ankara. The children of these displaced Kurds have radically shifted voting patterns in the large metropolises.

An important development in the 1990s was the emergence of political parties that promoted a civil agenda to achieve collective rights for Kurds. The parties were closed one after another on terrorism-related charges and essentially blocked from entering parliament by the high election threshold of 10 percent of the vote. Although their politicians were often imprisoned, some won seats as independents. In 2008, the Peace and Democratic Party was established. Unlike the other parties that were closed down, this one was dissolved by its own members as it transformed into the HDP.

The Palestinian citizens of Israel mainly opted for civil action, while the nationalist armed struggle was conducted by Palestinians in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Yet nonviolent actions at times have been met with lethal force. On March 30, 1976, protests broke out against state policies of expropriating Palestinian land in Israel’s northern Galilee region, and security forces killed six Palestinians. In October 2000, 13 unarmed protesters were killed by security forces after crowds took to the streets to show

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solidarity with Palestinians protesting in the West Bank and Gaza during the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

Palestinian citizens of Israel traditionally have been divided among different political camps. For years, the home for those promoting a Palestinian agenda was the Israeli Communist Party (which had a mixed Jewish and Arab membership)—now the core of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash). While the communists have long been able to organize and participate in elections, Palestinian nationalists at times have boycotted elections, and some groupings have been banned from participating, such as the Al-Ard movement in the 1960s and a 1980s Jewish-Arab list that campaigned for Palestinian rights.

Nevertheless, the trend toward Palestinian nationalist-oriented parties continued, culminating in 1999 with the founding of the National Democratic Assembly, known in Hebrew as Balad and in Arabic as Tajammua. During the 1990s, some Palestinians in Israel also supported the Islamic party known by its Hebrew acronym, Ra'am, and influential politicians such as Ahmad Tibi, who chairs the Ta'al party and is now the longest-serving Palestinian in the Knesset (parliament).

TRANSFORMATIVE PARTIES

The emergence of the HDP in Turkey in 2012 and the Joint List in Israel in 2015 marked a major transformation in each country. These parties have moved into the arena of national politics, extending beyond their own communities. Both parties challenge not only the hegemonic power of the national leaders, but also the reluctance of the main opposition camps to recognize minority rights.

Neither party is ethnically or religiously homogeneous. Even though the HDP is a majority-Kurdish party, it is supported by (and represents) ethnic Turkish Muslims. Its parliamentary candidates and supporters include a visible presence of Armenians, Assyrians, Alevis, and other disenfranchised groups. The Joint List is also home to multiple groups; among its Palestinian members, there are Muslims, Christians, and Druze. In addition, a small but significant percentage of Jews, made up of Communists, anti-Zionists, and progressives of various stripes, supports the party. Both the HDP and the Joint List are rights-based parties that place the sanctity of citizenship over ethnicity and religion, offering a third way to members of the majority ethnic groups and other minorities.

In 2015, both parties made their way onto the national stage. In Turkey's June 2015 elections, under the charismatic co-leadership of Selahattin Demirtaş, the HDP received 13.7 percent of the vote—enough to enter parliament as the fourth-largest party and deny the AKP a majority. With the HDP standing firmly against Erdoğan, alongside other parties, the AKP opted for new elections. Meanwhile, the cease-fire between the government and the PKK came to an abrupt end.

In November 2015, snap elections were held and the HDP once again crossed the 10-percent threshold. The formula of representing not only Kurdish voices, but those of other oppressed groups as well, again succeeded in lifting the party over the electoral hurdle that had previously kept it out of parliament. However, the AKP still regained a majority.

That same year in Israel, several parties united to form the Joint List under the leadership of Ayman Odeh, a young leader from the Hadash party, whose vision of unity bears a striking resemblance to that of Demirtaş. The Joint List garnered 10.5 percent of the vote in the 2015 elections, taking 13 seats and becoming the third-largest party in the Knesset.

Certainly, there are some stark differences between the HDP and the Joint List. The HDP served as a left-wing front, opposing the AKP's conservative government while also giving a home to Turkish voices that were not welcome in the country's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), which remains in essence an ideologically secular party in the Kemalist tradition of the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The HDP promised equal representation for women; the party's rules require both male and female co-chairs. It also reached out to the LGBT community, even though its Kurdish constituency included religious conservatives. This was key to creating an atmosphere of across-the-board solidarity.

The HDP had begun to play an even more important role as clampdowns on dissent intensified following mass protests in 2013 that began in opposition to a development plan for Gezi Park, in the center of Istanbul. During the protests, new coalitions were created among different social groups, suggesting rising demand for a leftist party that would take on injustices against the Kurds but also address other pressing issues related to gender, the environment, and human rights. The HDP took an outspoken stance against Erdoğan's bid to transfer new powers to the presidency, de-

spite the risk of disrupting ongoing peace talks between the government and the PKK, in which some HDP members were playing key parts.

In comparison with the HDP, the Joint List could be considered a marriage of convenience, or perhaps even a forced marriage of sorts, to ensure that the three parties involved (Hadash, Ra'am-Ta'al, and Balad) could cross the 3.25-percent threshold put in place by the Netanyahu government to block Palestinian parties from qualifying for parliamentary seats. The formation of this coalition was a direct response to intensifying calls from right-wing (and some centrist) parties to shut down the more radical Palestinian voices in the Knesset, such as the outspoken female member Haneen Zoabi. The emergence of the Joint List took the Israeli establishment by surprise. Few could have predicted that these very different parties would be able to put their long history of rivalry aside and join forces.

Among the parties of the Joint List, only Hadash can be described as a Jewish-Arab party (though the nationalist Balad has a small number of active Jewish members). This is where the HDP and Joint List diverge. The vast majority of Israeli Jews have not broken away from the Zionist consensus of seeing Israel as a state created solely for Jews. Even the far-left Meretz party marks a clear division between itself and the Joint List. The Turkish left has a long history of being persecuted by the government, which has pushed it toward solidarity with its Kurdish counterparts. Such a bond has never really emerged between the Jewish left and Palestinian citizens in Israel.

UNDER PRESSURE

Since their breakthroughs in 2015, the HDP and the Joint List have faced continuous attacks from their governments. In Turkey, this has occurred within the context of broader clampdowns on dissent that began before a failed coup attempt in July 2016 and became much worse in its aftermath. But for Kurds, having to endure random arrests, repression of their politicians, and arbitrary nullification of their electoral gains is nothing new—such abuses have been routine since the 1980s. True, in the first decade of Erdoğan's rule, some believed the country was on a new path, as his government made conciliatory moves such as lifting the ban on speaking Kurdish in the public sphere. More recently, however, the mass arrests of most of the HDP's members of parliament, including its co-leaders, Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ,

who were arrested in November 2016 and remain behind bars today, demonstrate that the AKP has turned out to be not much different from the secular elites it prided itself on replacing.

Indeed, any expression of solidarity for increasing Kurdish rights in Turkey is now completely taboo for the AKP. Hundreds of academics were jailed, handed suspended prison sentences, and fired from their university posts for signing a petition protesting civilian casualties after the ongoing war between the government and the PKK flared up again in 2015. (Some have recently been acquitted.) But ambivalence toward Kurdish rights is not found only in the AKP. The opposition CHP permitted the lifting of parliamentary immunity so that HDP deputies could be arrested, highlighting the tacit support this crackdown had across much of the Turkish political spectrum.

While Demirtaş ran in the June 2018 presidential election from prison, receiving 8.4 percent of the vote, his party won 11.7 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections held the same day, once again clearing the threshold to qualify for seats. Despite the purges and mass arrests of numerous elected HDP mayors who were replaced with government officials, the AKP has yet to break the power of the upstart party, which has proved its enduring appeal among the Kurdish population and the Turkish left.

Since the 2015 elections, Palestinian citizens in Israel have been subjected to rising public displays of racism by the government, including the enactment of the Nation-State Law. On the surface, the Palestinian citizens of Israel may seem far better off than their Kurdish counterparts, who have suffered political persecution and a high number of civilian deaths. Yet the Israeli authorities continue to rule over 2.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank—who cannot participate in elections—and maintain a blockade of the Gaza Strip. In regular clashes over the past year and a half, Israeli forces have killed nearly 200 protesters on the Gaza border.

These killings have met with near complete silence from the Israeli Jewish population. This is strikingly similar to the silence from most of the Turkish population during the winter of 2015–16 as whole cities in the mostly Kurdish southeast were placed under months-long curfews and hundreds of civilians were killed in renewed fighting between the military and the PKK. For Palestinians in the occupied territories, the Palestinian members of the Knesset are important voices for their

plight, even if they are not officially representatives of these noncitizens.

TURNING POINTS?

The elections of 2019 were decisive moments in Turkey and Israel. In each country, the leading opposition forces at last began to understand that without support from the main minority—Kurds in Turkey, Palestinians in Israel—they will not be able to end the dominance of Erdoğan or Netanyahu, each of whom is quickly transforming his country into something that no longer resembles a democracy. The rights-based agendas of the new minority parties, the HDP and the Joint List, are now penetrating the politics of the ethnic majorities.

The Turkish opposition failed to stop Erdoğan in his 2017 constitutional referendum on transforming Turkey's political system into one dominated by an executive presidency, or in the 2018 election in which he won a second term as president thanks to his new pact with the far-right, anti-Kurdish Nationalist Movement Party. The 2019 municipal elections marked the first time that the opposition started to unravel the control Erdoğan and the AKP have gained over the country and the electorate. Erdoğan gambled that his removals and arrests of Kurdish mayors would weaken the HDP, but the party managed to hold its own, winning back most of the municipalities where its mayors had been removed. (However, 20 of the newly elected HDP mayors have already been removed from office; some of them were arrested on terrorism-related charges.) For Erdoğan, the greatest blow was the loss of the major municipalities: Ankara and Istanbul went to the CHP after it reached an agreement with smaller opposition parties to support one main candidate in each race. The HDP was an essential participant in the pact—its jailed leader, Demirtaş, expressed support for the CHP candidates in Istanbul and other cities.

In Istanbul, the CHP candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, won the March election by 18,000 votes, but election authorities, under pressure from Erdoğan, nullified the result after the AKP claimed that there had been widespread vote fraud, and a do-over was held in June. This time, İmamoğlu won by a whopping 800,000 votes. In both rounds, he made sure to recognize the power of the Kurdish vote. He called for the release of Demirtaş and the

other jailed HDP members, claiming that Erdoğan was using the charges against them to silence the Kurds. Perhaps even more important than Kurds voting for İmamoğlu was the fact that this alliance was publicly affirmed: İmamoğlu openly thanked Demirtaş and the HDP for their support.

However, the recent Turkish-led invasion of northern Syria, aiming to drive Syrian Kurdish forces with links to the PKK (who had been US allies against the Islamic State) from an area next to the border, has exacerbated tensions at home. More than 200,000 Syrians have been displaced by the offensive, according to the United Nations, and Turkey's Syrian Arab proxy forces have allegedly committed abuses against Kurdish civilians. Yet the Turkish opposition threw its full support behind the operation, leaving the HDP as the only party criticizing it, and protests were quickly quashed by police.

In Israel, so far in 2019 there have been two indecisive general elections, in April and September, and there is a possibility of yet another in December. But Palestinian citizens have made headway in securing a new legitimacy from certain segments of the Jewish majority.

Ahead of the April election, the Joint List broke up as some members opted to go back to running as individual parties, leaving a union of just two parties.

The outcome was a sharp decline in the Arab vote; Hadash and the Arab parties together dropped from 13 seats to only 10. Netanyahu had cameras placed in polling stations in Arab cities and villages, a measure intended to deter voters from turning out in large numbers. In the runup to the election, he also led a campaign of anti-Arab incitement, stressing that Israel is “the national state, not of all its citizens, but only of the Jewish people.” (For Netanyahu, winning another term is a matter of personal survival, since he is facing a possible indictment on corruption charges; as long as he remains prime minister, he has immunity from prosecution.)

Meanwhile, the new hope of the Israeli opposition, former military chief of staff Benny Gantz, who leads the centrist Blue and White party, adopted a nationalist stance. Campaigning for the April election, he declared that he would only work with Zionist parties—a code signaling that he would exclude the Palestinian-based parties from any governing coalition and decline their outside support for forming a government. Netanyahu and his right-wing allies still won 60 seats,

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just one short of a majority. Only a boycott by former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, head of the secular nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party, thwarted Netanyahu's coalition-building efforts and eventually led to new elections. Lieberman's refusal to join a Netanyahu government has nothing to do with Palestinian rights; he insists that the prime minister roll back the growing influence of the ultra-Orthodox parties whose backing has helped keep him in power.

The Joint List regrouped and mounted a successful campaign for the September election that left it with 13 seats again. Gantz could no longer ignore the Palestinian bloc. In the wake of the April election, his language had already become more inclusive. Following the September vote, the Joint List's Odeh vowed to support Gantz; however, three members of the bloc, all from the nationalist Balad party, withheld their support. But Netanyahu was again unable to form a government, and currently Gantz is trying to form one; new elections are once more on the horizon if he fails. On October 31, Gantz met with members of the Joint List to discuss their possible membership in a governing coalition—or at least an agreement whereby they would support his government in no-confidence votes, which could pave the way for a minority government.

The Joint List has constantly been in the news since the September elections, giving the party a newfound legitimacy as a potential governing partner. Even if Netanyahu and Gantz form a unity government, this will give the Joint List the role of leading the opposition, since they are the third-largest party in the Knesset—and thrust them into the center of the Israeli political arena.

THE LIMITS OF SOLIDARITY

Kurds in Turkey and the Palestinian citizens of Israel face the same conundrum: How do you stay loyal to your ethnic group while remaining a citizen of a country that is essentially at war with the group to which you belong? The recent turn toward rights-based parties looks set to strengthen the tenuous positions these groups have maintained over the past few decades. However, in both countries, the burden of finding a middle path is placed on the ethnic minorities. The dominant majorities are unwilling to open doors for them.

The challenges facing the Kurds and the Palestinians are much greater than the attacks they face from national leaders who use these minorities as convenient punching bags to gain electoral advan-

tage. The bigger problem is the intolerant and nationalist Turkish and Israeli majorities that refuse to hear the voices of the “other” within their own societies. If they do acknowledge the minorities, it is only to suit their own needs.

In Turkey, most in the majority see the PKK and the HDP as the “bad” Kurds, while accepting those who forfeit any aspects of their identity that are perceived as posing a challenge to the majority's own identity. In Israel, Jewish politicians, from the left to the right, constantly allege that Palestinian leaders do not really care about their own constituents and instead are fixated on the rights of the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza—a claim that ignores the fact that Palestinian citizens vote overwhelmingly for the Joint List and support a civil agenda for securing collective rights. Thus, in the Israeli majority's view, the “good” Palestinians are the ones who erase their own identities and remain silent on the greater Palestinian issue.

In both Turkey and Israel, the recent turn of the main opposition parties toward looking to these minorities for support comes at a parallel juncture. The center-left parties seem to have reached the realization that without this support, they will remain minorities as well. Given this reality, their own success depends on reaching out to ethnic minorities, and not vice versa. Any steps taken in this direction will strengthen the notion of universal citizenship and allow for a liberalization of both Turkish and Israeli society, encouraging other groups disenfranchised within their states to push for equality as well.

As long as the Kurdish-Turkish and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts loom in the background, however, it is likely that any sense of solidarity among the majority on behalf of the minority will be limited in scope. For any real change to happen, each country will need to undergo a major political shift, legislating official recognition of the two national minorities and their special places in society. Since Israel and Turkey are still embroiled in violent conflicts with these two ethnic minorities, within their borders and beyond, such a shift may seem unlikely. But recognizing the rights and history of the “other” can lead both countries to a possible exit from conflict and set them on a path of reconciliation. This is why the emergence of new opposition leaders who are willing to interact with the Kurds or the Palestinians marks an important shift from the politics of Erdoğan and Netanyahu, both of whom have worked to deepen the existing divisions within their societies. ■

The Lebanese Rise Up Against a Failed System

MARWAN M. KRAIDY

On October 17, 2019, the Lebanese took to the streets in protests that spread from Beirut to the entire country within hours and to the diaspora within days. The trigger was a proposal by the minister of telecommunications to tax Internet voice calls to the tune of \$6 per month. Some media dubbed the uprising the “WhatsApp protest,” after the popular Facebook-owned voice-and-text platform. This unfortunate tendency to use tech lingo to explain contentious politics goes back to the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings of nearly a decade ago, which were tagged as the “Twitter” and “Facebook” revolutions. Then as now, such labeling simplifies the complexity of a genuine popular uprising against a corrupt ruling class and the political and economic system that this class represents.

In Lebanon, the “WhatsApp tax” may have been the straw that broke the camel’s back, but the camel has been ailing for years. In the past decade, the Lebanese have endured a garbage crisis, palpable environmental degradation, assorted political dramas, mounting corruption by a brazen ruling elite, and a rapidly deteriorating economic situation that by the start of the protests had become a full-fledged emergency. Inequality is extreme: the top 1 percent of the adult population takes home half of the total national income, while the share of the income pie for the bottom 50 percent of the population’s comes to just a tenth. And Lebanon’s gigantic national debt stood at 140 percent of gross domestic product in 2018.

As debt payment deadlines loomed, credit agencies downgraded Lebanese government bonds in January and August 2019, then again in October. A year ago, the central bank ordered institutions to pay salaries in Lebanese pounds, and now banks set limits on withdrawals in US dollars. The pound’s dollar peg has come under the most severe strain in twenty years. Panic set in as many Lebanese recalled with horror the dark days of gal-

loping inflation in the 1980s. In this environment, only a cruel and unprincipled political class could have come up with the government’s proposal to offset a small portion of the national debt by cutting the salaries of public servants. In September, news that Prime Minister Saad Hariri several years earlier had paid a South African swimsuit model \$16 million exposed the gaping chasm between the elite and the populace, even if the timing of the disclosure was dubious.

As if these difficulties were not enough, an unprecedented and suspicious wave of forest fires in early October escalated the popular malaise to biblical proportions. As millions of trees burned, including old specimens of the cherished cedar that emblazons the national flag, the government’s incompetence was in full view: firefighting helicopters stood idle, lacking spare parts. While billowing smoke choked the sky over the entire country, a fireman’s death in one of the blazes further stoked public anger.

Within 24 hours of the first protest, the legendary slogan of the 2010–11 Arab uprisings resounded in Lebanese cities from Tripoli in the north to Tyre in the south, with a slightly different nuance: “The people want to topple the system.” In Lebanon’s October uprising more than in the Arab Spring, the Arabic word *nidham* refers to the “system” that props up a corrupt and inhumane political economy of governance, rather than a political “regime” personified by a dictator. Unlike in Egypt and Tunisia back then, and like their peers in Iraq and Algeria now, Lebanese protesters lack a reviled tyrant as a single target.

The breathtaking corruption of politicians has trumped sectarian loyalties and turned the entire ruling class into the target of protest. The slogan “All of them means all of them” soon supplanted “The people want to topple the system,” casting the ruling elite as a loathsome and indivisible entity. Protesters started a bonfire on a key intersection in Beirut, with the highly symbolic backdrop of a side-by-side mosque minaret and church bell tower, challenging politicians who proffer platitudes about interreligious coexistence while

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sharing the bounty of a national embezzlement scheme.

A CHANGED ENVIRONMENT

In the past, feuding sectarian leaders organized protests and counterprotests in Lebanon. During the 2005 Independence Intifada (also known as the Cedar Revolution), which was triggered by the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, incumbent leaders stood at a podium in Martyrs' Square in Beirut to address their followers. Advertising executives were recruited to brand the demonstrations. Shameless politicians shuttled to Washington, Paris, and Damascus to solicit external help against their opponents.

The Independence Intifada included brief moments of cross-sectarian solidarity but quickly devolved into sectarian bickering. While the central demand in the initial protest that year was accountability for Hariri's murder and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, dueling demonstrations gave rise to the major alliances that have dominated Lebanese politics ever since: the Saudi- and US-supported March 14 coalition led by Saad Hariri, and the Iranian-supported March 8 bloc comprising Hezbollah and President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement.

The current movement is different. Unlike what happened in 2005, this is a genuine bottom-up popular uprising that crosscuts traditional political loyalties. The ongoing protests erupted throughout the country, whereas in 2005 they remained confined to Beirut. In 2019, politicians are the targets of protests, not the organizers; the current upheaval appears leaderless, focused on socioeconomic issues and animated by a deep anger against the entire political class.

This does not preclude attempts by sectarian leaders and regional powers to subvert the protests. It is likely that Saudi Arabia was behind Hariri's October 29 resignation as prime minister, which left the Iran-backed Aoun and Hezbollah as the main targets of the uprising. Both Iran's supreme leader and the US secretary of state have made prescriptive statements, suggesting an internationalization of the crisis.

The Lebanese media and information sphere has also changed drastically since 2005. Then, protests were amplified by powerful television and

press organs that commanded large audiences and mobilized them around the sectarian leaders who owned these outlets. Today, major newspapers and television channels have faded, facilitating the emergence of civic narratives on social media while also spurring the spread of misinformation.

Beirut's two venerable newspapers are either dead (the left-of-center *Assafir*) or moribund (the right-of-center *Annahar*). A few months ago, Hariri shut down Future TV for financial reasons, and the Free Patriotic Movement's OTV struggles to attract an audience beyond party loyalists. Although less controlled by the ruling clique than it used to be, the media landscape is still polarized: Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV remains a force to be reckoned with, but so do its ideological opponents—LBC, a right-of-center outlet that emerged in the 1980s, and MTV, increasingly the voice of the Christian right.

Now, however, the robust network of Lebanese civil society and activist groups has a strong Internet presence. In the first days of the 2019 protests,

a video of a woman kicking a politician's armed bodyguard went viral—the first iconic image of a popular revolution. The evolving digital ecosystem has weakened the elite's ability to shape public opinion, contributing to a Lebanese information sphere that is diverse but fragmented and volatile.

Since 2005, repression has increased. Social media posts have resulted in arrests. A concert by the rock band Mashrou' Leila was canceled in August 2019 on moral grounds after a rabidly populist Twitter campaign by political entrepreneurs.

The current protests have spawned awkward and revealing vignettes of change. The Hezbollah flag was conspicuously absent and the Lebanese flag visible on the screen when Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech. Television channels covering the protests live were caught muting the sound when protesters shouted slogans impugning the channels' political patrons.

As raw and righteous anger is blunted by the passage of time, there is a high risk that wily politicians supported by foreign patrons will turn protesters against each other with virulent sectarian rhetoric. But today's uprising appears to be a genuine bottom-up swell of anger against a political class that has turned Lebanon into a Mediterranean dystopia of greed, corruption, pollution, and

The octopus of political sectarianism that chokes Lebanon has a weaker hold on members of this generation.

overall human degradation. Decentralized protests resounding with chants of “All of them means all of them” help preempt sectarian manipulation.

GENERATIONAL SHIFT

There is a new feeling on the streets of Lebanon as a new generation rises up. Thirty years ago, on October 22, 1989, the warlords who waged Lebanon’s civil war huddled in the Saudi resort city of Taif to sign a peace agreement that improved the state’s sectarian balance but made paralysis and dysfunction permanent and enshrined systemic corruption. The new taxes recently announced by the government, including the infamous WhatsApp tax, were scheduled to go into effect on October 22, thirty years to the day after Taif.

This gives the October 2019 protests an unmistakable generational dimension. Many demonstrators are under 30—which means that they were born after Taif. The young people occupying streets and squares with their elders did not live through the civil war. They came of age in the relatively stable and prosperous years of the mid-2000s, and may have become politicized during the 2005 Independence Intifada. Their hopes were dashed by the escalating economic crisis; they face bleak employment and housing prospects.

The octopus of political sectarianism that chokes Lebanon has a weaker hold on members of this generation than on their parents or older siblings. Their political leanings and actions are shaped largely by bread-and-butter issues. Their quality of life has plummeted; their cities reek of garbage; their roads are snarled with traffic; they pay twice for electrical power and water supply from both the unreliable government and the private utility “mafias.” Lebanon’s gigantic debt, which already constrained youth employment by dampening business investment (particularly

from abroad), became a crisis for the young when they were hit by austerity measures, then an emergency when banks placed limits on withdrawals from cash machines.

The protesters are not motivated by specific political ideologies. Rather, they have mobilized against a corrupt political class that has driven those who could leave into exile and cornered those who could not into rebellion.

These protests did not emerge out of nowhere. They build on a rich recent history of dissent: activism for a faster and freer Internet, gender equality, more representative election laws, historic preservation, and access to public space; a 2013 campaign for the rights of domestic workers; a besieged yet resilient LGBT movement; the 2015 You Stink campaign in response to the country’s garbage crisis; Palestinian activism for socioeconomic inclusion; and the secular Beirut Madinati political alliance that contested the 2016 municipal election. Although none of these groupings is claiming leadership of the current protests, activists who cut their teeth in previous scuffles with “the system” are playing an important role today.

The October uprising is a new layer in a sedimented political history, but the question is whether this anti-sectarian mobilization will give birth to the post-sectarian political order to which many Lebanese aspire. In recent years, waves of popular discontent that looked promising have fizzled into oblivion. But this leaderless, decentralized protest movement is different, and undeterred by the tragedy of the Syrian revolution next door. Whatever the eventual outcome, the October 2019 protests in Lebanon have accomplished an important feat: Lebanese leaders are now more afraid of the people than the people are afraid of them. This allows a new generation to feel a better future within its grasp. ■

Emotion and Authoritarian Rule in Syria

OMAR AL-GHAZZI

How does a regime manage to stay in power for decades? How do protests that start peacefully end up being eclipsed by a devastating war? Did things have to turn out this way in Syria? While finding definitive answers may be impossible, two recently published books certainly help us reflect on these inescapable questions: Salwa Ismail's *The Rule of Violence* and Lisa Wedeen's *Authoritarian Apprehensions*.

These latest works from two influential scholars of Middle East politics and society complement each other. Both authors rely on conversations and interviews with Syrians. Both probe the interactions of emotion and ideology in their nuanced analyses of political dynamics under authoritarian rule. And both focus on citizen-state interactions and questions about the nature of the Syrian political system.

Ismail and Wedeen both analyze the push and pull factors that contribute to the resilience of authoritarianism. Ismail's account is more concerned with the push factors: How does an authoritarian regime set out to create obedient subjects? And how does it react when that effort fails? She speaks of violence and brutality not in terms of individual government policies but in the context of state governance and how citizens encounter it.

For her part, Wedeen emphasizes how Syria's authoritarian regime under President Bashar al-Assad (in power since 2000, when he succeeded his late father, Hafez) has operated in a neoliberal era by seeking to seduce citizens with promises of the good life and thereby gain their active support, or at least their passive acquiescence. Whereas Ismail argues that violence is the key to understanding subjectivity and government in Syria, Wedeen

discusses the ways in which ideology and emotion become entangled in complex and contradictory ways as they involve citizens in the ruling system.

Ismail sees violence as a method and logic of governance for the Assad regime. It is unleashed at times when the regime confronts popular uprisings. But there are also everyday forms of violence in interactions between citizens and the state. Ismail argues that the extent and extreme form of violence in Syria—in massacres, assassinations, and prison torture—are aimed not just at crushing opponents in the short term, but also at establishing the logic of state-citizen relations in the long term.

The everyday nature of violence, Ismail says, is performed and communicated via state institutions and through political culture. For example, state violence is reflected in the ways in which discipline is enforced in schools and youth camps, which live on in the memories of her interlocutors. Central to Ismail's argument is the claim that collective memory keeps modes of violence at the forefront of political subjectivity, which she defines as citizens' positioning and agency in relation to the government and its apparatuses of rule. She does not dwell on the reasons for the 2011 uprising or explain what factors changed to pave the way for it. But she suggests that many Syrians felt that their sense of abjection had become intolerable.

In Wedeen's account, the key concept is ideology—more precisely, the ideological dynamics that ensnare citizens in Syria's autocratic system. She rejects what she calls “economic determinism” in explanations of the 2011 uprising, and seeks to complicate the category of sectarianism, which is often lazily deployed in analyses of the region. Instead, Wedeen focuses on the ideological work of neoliberal authoritarianism. She argues that it creates and sustains an “ambivalent middle” constituting the majority of Syrian society.

The Rule of Violence: Subjectivity, Memory, and Government in Syria
by Salwa Ismail
Cambridge University Press, 2018

Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgment, and Mourning in Syria
by Lisa Wedeen
University of Chicago Press, 2019

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The members of this “middle” are those who neither supported the uprising nor were tied to the ruling regime. Activists have dubbed them “the gray people” and have accused them of taking an ambiguous position toward the regime and its acts of violence. The “middle” could have tilted the balance in favor of the uprising but it did not. Wedeen frames this inaction as a political choice. She partly attributes it to the regime’s success in presenting its rule as a benevolent form of authoritarianism and as the only route to class mobility and the good life. One way it has done so is by branding Assad and his wife Asma as a glamorous celebrity couple.

DOUBT AND FEAR

Despite the different directions of their arguments, both authors emphasize the importance of performance and emotion in authoritarian governance. They both show that authoritarian rule and warfare involve harnessing emotions—for instance, by encouraging fear of other communities rather than of the regime itself, or turning anger from an emotion with a purpose into a generalized reaction to uncertainty.

Wedeen discusses a range of affective dynamics that feed into support for or ambivalence toward the regime. Syrians may feel that they are better off with the status quo, or they may harbor sectarian fears alongside sentimental nationalism. In her discussion of neoliberalism, she is more interested in the effectiveness of the regime’s promises than in the resentment that its glitzy self-presentation might stir among the deprived majority. Compared with Ismail, Wedeen does not sufficiently consider fear of the regime as a factor pushing people, especially the middle class, into preferring the status quo.

Ismail argues that horror has been the emotion central to Syrian governance since the 2011 uprising. In her account of horror and how it seeps into both everyday and spectacular events, she vividly reflects on the question of what one would feel in the face of massive state brutality. Ismail’s perspective implies that the silence of the “ambivalent middle” is enforced by fear. When horror is a mode of governance, citizens’ subjectivity cannot be understood in isolation from its relation to that horror. When the factors that push citizens into acquiescence are so pervasive, they overshadow

any factors that pull people toward supporting the state.

Wedeen and Ismail each discuss the deployment of doubt and uncertainty as a tool of authoritarian communication strategies. They both point out how the Assad regime has created an atmosphere where rumors thrive and the unbelievable seems to happen routinely. The goal is to cause citizens to have a gut reaction of disbelief to whatever they see and hear. That pervasive sense of uncertainty is politically useful for authoritarian rulers because it prevents the emergence of a coherent counternarrative that citizens can agree on. Substituted for anger, uncertainty and doubt engender a passive sense of despair.

Ismail discusses this phenomenon in terms of “the political uncanny.” She gives the example of a woman who was believed to have been arrested, tortured, and murdered, only to appear very much alive on state television weeks after the rumors and images of her purportedly mutilated body had spread on social media.

Wedeen explores the doubt surrounding figures such as a singer-activist (whose identity was never revealed) who became the subject of rumors that he may have been a regime informant. She also discusses how doubt and uncertainty have clouded the reporting and circulation of news of chemical attacks in the suburbs of Damascus.

At a time when there is a lot of noise about Syria but very little informed analysis or interest in listening to Syrians, these two books are necessary contributions. Political observers, who often have the loudest voices, see what is happening from narrow points of view related to their assessment of how the situation fits into broader geopolitical alignments. Many scholars with Syria expertise rely on an essentialist lens that sees little beyond religious sects as political agents or units that date back centuries.

Given this context, the recent books from Salwa Ismail and Lisa Wedeen provide a welcome shift in perspective. Instead of exclusively focusing on sectarian conflict, or attributing conflict to class warfare, each author offers an analysis that closely considers how citizens have encountered the state in Syria, and how emotion and memory have played important roles in these experiences that are often neglected by political scientists. ■

October 2019

ARGENTINA

Oct. 27—Alberto Fernández is elected president with 48% of the vote, ousting the incumbent Mauricio Macri, who takes 41%. Fernández's victory marks a resurgence of the left-wing populist Peronist tradition, and of former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who will be vice president. Macri had promised that free-market reforms and austerity would revive the economy, but failed to avert a deep recession.

BOLIVIA

Oct. 24—The incumbent, Evo Morales, is declared the winner of an Oct. 20 presidential election with 47% of the vote; no runoff is required because his margin of victory narrowly exceeds 10 points after a delayed vote count. The main opposition candidate, former President Carlos Mesa, says the official tally is fraudulent and the Organization of American States calls for a runoff, as violent protests spread across the country. Morales, the country's 1st indigenous president, claims his 4th term, having won a 2017 court ruling to circumvent term limits.

CANADA

Oct. 21—Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party wins just 33% of the popular vote and loses its majority in the House of Commons, ending up with 157 out of 338 seats, 27 fewer than in the last election in 2015. But Trudeau is expected to form a minority government dependent on outside support from smaller parties.

CHILE

Oct. 19—President Sebastián Piñera cancels an increase in subway fares that precipitated the worst outbreak of nationwide civil unrest in decades. Days of rioting had prompted Piñera to declare that the nation was "at war." Despite other concessions by the government, violent protests against inequality continue through the end of the month, leaving at least 20 dead.

CHINA

Oct. 1—At a commemoration of the 70th anniversary of Communist Party rule, marked by a massive military parade in Beijing, President Xi Jinping declares, "No force can obstruct the advance of the Chinese people and Chinese nation." But protesters in Hong Kong attempt to disrupt the occasion with 1 of the largest and most violent demonstrations in months of unrest over tightening control from Beijing; 1 protester is shot by a police officer.

IRAQ

Oct. 29—Masked gunmen kill 18 people in an attack on protesters at a tent encampment in the Shia holy city of Karbala. It is 1 of the deadliest incidents in a nationwide wave of protests that began Oct. 1, denouncing corruption, political dysfunction, and Iranian influence. A total of more than 250 people have been killed so far. Protesters blame Iran-backed militias for responding to the demonstrations with deadly force.

LEBANON

Oct. 29—Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his cabinet resign, meeting 1 demand of nationwide mass protests that have continued for 2 weeks. The government's plan to raise taxes on messaging services, including widely used WhatsApp, triggered the popular uprising. But the protesters have expressed discontent over the corruption of the ruling elite, deficient public services, and Iranian influence, calling for an end to the post-civil war governing system based on a formula balancing sectarian groups.

POLAND

Oct. 13—In parliamentary elections, the conservative populist ruling party, Law and Justice (PiS), retains a majority of 235 seats in the 460-seat lower chamber but loses control of the upper house. The main opposition party, the center-right Civic Platform, wins only 134 seats. But the outcome of the election will make it harder for PiS and its leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, to enact sweeping constitutional changes, though it has already reduced the independence of the judiciary and the media. A left-wing coalition finishes 3rd, winning 43 seats.

PORTUGAL

Oct. 6—The Socialist Party of incumbent Prime Minister António Costa finishes 1st in parliamentary elections with 36% of the vote and 106 seats, 20 more than it held previously but 8 short of a majority. Costa Oct. 26 returns to office leading a minority government with outside backing in parliament from smaller parties on the left. He is credited with cutting the budget deficit and halving unemployment to 7% while presiding over a recovery in economic growth following a debt crisis and deep recession. But he faces criticism for leaving public services underfunded and rising inequality.

SPAIN

Oct. 14—The Supreme Court imposes lengthy prison terms on 9 leaders of the Catalan independence movement for attempting to secede in 2017. The former vice president of the province of Catalonia, Oriol Junqueras, receives the longest term, 13 years. After the verdicts, a Spanish judge issues a new arrest warrant for the former provincial president, Carles Puigdemont, who is in self-imposed exile in Belgium, where judges have denied Spain's requests for his extradition. Protesters immediately take to the streets in Barcelona; subsequent protests over the next 2 weeks take a violent turn and lead to 100s of arrests.

SYRIA

Oct. 6—US President Donald Trump unexpectedly announces that he will withdraw US forces from northeast Syria, clearing the way for a threatened Turkish military incursion to drive away from the border area US-backed Syrian Kurdish militia forces that played a crucial role in operations against the Islamic State (ISIS). Turkey Oct. 9 launches the cross-border offensive.

Oct. 14—After drawing bipartisan condemnation in Congress for abandoning the US's Kurdish allies, Trump says he will impose sanctions on Turkey. But after talks in Ankara, US Vice President Mike Pence Oct. 17 announces that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has agreed to a 5-day cease-fire to allow a Kurdish withdrawal, and that all sanctions will be lifted once it is implemented.

Oct. 27—Trump announces that US commandos have killed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, in a raid on a compound in northwest Syria. Kurdish forces reportedly provided key intelligence support for the operation.

TUNISIA

Oct. 13—Kais Saied, a law professor backed by Islamist parties, wins a runoff for the presidency with 72% of the vote. His leading rival, media tycoon Nabil Karoui, was jailed for much of the campaign on money laundering charges. Saied succeeds the late President Beji Caid Essebsi, who died in office in July at the age of 92 after becoming the country's 1st democratically elected president in 2014, following the uprising that toppled the dictatorial regime of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in 2011. ■

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